# The Wind in the Garden

Hewes Lancaster

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# THE WIND IN THE GARDEN

# The Wind in the Garden

by

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"The One and the Other"

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Dedicated to

*The Fairest Garden of All*
*When One Lies Sleeping*

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## CHAPTER I

# The Garden

"SHE was not at grave," Madame Bigone said, "mais, maybe she was at church?"

Madame Croisant shook her sorrowful head. Not being one of the chief mourners she could confess to having considered the crowd:

"I look, me," she said. "Look plenty — God knows." And she sighed, for, indeed, Virginia Cleve had not been at her father's funeral.

The boat-loads of people returning from that funeral were streaming past M. Lerot's garden. It was a wonderful garden, willow-wound and water-dipped, where hyacinths tangled and green things leaned over and the sun shone down; but each man in passing kept his boat clear of it as from a thing of fear.

Madame Bigone lifted her paddle from its steering and pointed discreetly toward the old shack on the farther shore:

"*He* was not at grave?"

Madame Croisant admitted it, sighing sorrowfully again.

"He was closest kin Brave Bigone have," Madame Bigone said severely. "He was half-brot'er wit' Brave."

Madame Croisant, very thin and timid, was also

very tender in her heart and so in the face of her wise cousin's disapproval she began to excuse the old man's disrespect to the dead:

"Mais M. Lerot," she said, "he has lived by himself for such long time—wit' only fish to eat."

But Madame Bigone was wordly-wise. She had indeed, once gone out into the world — as a nurse in the family of a sugar planter — and lived there for nearly two weeks. She put the apology pitilessly aside:

"Pierre Lerot is crazy," she said.

Then, of course, the silent M. Bigone said what he always solidly said when the craziness of his cousin came into discussion —

"It is only for Mississippi river Pierre is crazy" — and Madame being too shrewd to waste an argument on this stubborn belief, went back to the shortcoming of Virginia, the dead man's daughter:

"Eh bien! I reckon, me, Virginia t'ink it is not only her papa who can get mad, maybe? When she run and make marry wit' American school teacher, her papa tell her never come on his side of Island some more. I reckon she t'ink she will not come, no!"

"Ah," Madame Croisant said, "maybe it is Virginia did not hear her papa was sick." She urged the excuse eagerly. — "M. Brave Bigone, he die so quick."

And, indeed he had died quickly — that powerful, passionate old man who had lived his life so hotly and so hardly, who it seemed must always live. Be-

fore the Messieurs had exchanged in passing a single:

"Et Brave Bigone, you have hear how he is? No?"—

Before Madame could ask of Madame, — Brave Bigone was dead.

The boat passed on in silence; the falling wind blew over; and all the garden breathed its sweetness to the sinking sun.

M. Lerot came down to the water's edge as he always did at the day's last hour. He had no garden on land, his shabby little shack stood desolate upon its bit of unkept batture. But here by the water he could smoke, and watch the light as it stole across in gleaming lines to lie down lovingly among his tangled masses of tossing bloom — his water-hyacinths.

"Seem like you grow pretty fast," he said to them, tenderly, "You have most take my landing, I reckon, me, you going to take all False river, ha?" His eyes brooded over the beauty that was crowding him out of his one possession that was worth the having but there was no reproach in the brooding. How beautiful they were! — Gay flower and green leaf tangling and massing and foaming together there on the dreaming water!

"If," Monsieur said, measuring their wide expanse with a loving eye, "if you don't quit grow so much it will soon be so man cannot pass up river. I don't believe, me, skiff *can* pass t'rough yonder now." He pointed his cigarette toward the cut

across from the southern bend that the boats, returning from the funeral, had so carefully avoided.

Ever since the Mississippi had made him mad, M. Lerot had lived alone. In his youth, men who knew had warned him how it would be. They had said earnestly:

"Pierre, when River make her mind to be mean to a man, what it is man should do? Voilà, he should go live hundred miles from her.

But Pierre Lerot had been a proud young man, big and strong.

He had laughed at the warning and slapped his paddle into the face of the Mississippi. And when the River in revenge had overturned his rafts in her eddys and set snags to wreck his boats, Pierre had laughed and defied her yet again. So they had striven, blow for blow until one day when Pierre was rowing across to take his girl to church the River had caved in the bank on which the girl stood waiting and waving to him. And then, having robbed him of his love and youth, and of all the eagerness of his life, the River gave Pierre in exchange the smell of her mud to be as madness to him forever. That was why after fifty years of time, men said even yet of old Pierre Lerot that he was crazy about the Mississippi.

M. Lerot was not crazy about other things. Smoking, with his eyes on that bend in False river he had seen clearly what would befall a boat that should try to take the short cut across — how it would be caught in the tangle and held helpless

there. And when he was awakened that night by a child's voice calling in his garden he knew at once what had happened:

"My hyacinths have catch boat for somebody, yes!"

He went down to his landing and listened. A fog was walking upon the face of False river — out of it came the call:

"Grandpa, Grandpa. I am afraid! I am afraid!"

"Mon Dieu, it is little girl," said Monsieur, and he called in answer:

"Reste tranquille, ma Bébé. Your Grandpa will come to you."

He shoved his pirogue into the water and cautiously, through the drip and drizzle of the fog, pushed his way into the tangle.

Comforted in his arms before the fire the little girl told him how it was:

"My mamma say to me, reste in boat till she come with my Grandpa." She nestled closer into the arms that had saved her. "My Grandpa is *big* man," she said satisfied. "It is plenty times my Mamma has tell me my Grandpa is big man. And she asked sleepily:

"Where is my Mamma?"

M. Lerot bent his head to escape the drowsy eyes. He had found the boat caught in the very heart of the tangle but the mother who had left the boat to swim ashore for help he had not found. Yet M. Lerot knew well enough where she was:

"I reckon, ma Bébé your Mamma has gone long way, maybe."

"Long way," the little girl echoed, and while she was being fed and cared for she kept telling the thought over in drowsy fashion:

"My Mamma has gone long way."

The murmur made Monsieur think of a tolling bell.

"She is for me," he said when he sat rocking the little sleeper in his arms. "She is for me. My hyacinths see how it is I am old man and all by myself in my shack. What it is hyacinths do? Voilà. Watch chance to catch baby for me. And it is garden she shall have. Garden on land. It shall be pretty as she is pretty. All night Monsieur thought of them—the gardens of Pointe Coupée, fence-bound and fragrant. But toward morning he remembered that there must be yet another garden of green things grown for his little girl. Bébé cannot eat only fish like old man can," he said. And daylight found him climbing the bank at the Bigone landing.

M. Bigone coming down for a look at False river gave courteous greeting, but M. Lerot had not time to waste upon brave manners. He asked:

"Ha, Charles? You got some cowpea you wish to sell for seed?"

"Seed," M. Bigone repeated. He was a heavy man; some said he was slow. "Seed!" Pierre Lerot had not planted a seed for fifty years.

"If you have seed to sell — Voilà vingt-cinque sous."

It was indeed twenty-five cents that he held in his palm and M. Bigone seeing it measured out the peck of peas. His amazement he could not measure out — it foamed over his lips like spilled milk:

"Nom de Dieu, Pierre. For why you should wish to make garden?"

Monsieur, pushing his pirogue into the water, explained over his bowed shoulder:

"Little girl cannot eat only fish like old man can."

"Little girl!"

"Oui," Monsieur said taking seat easy and sure as a duck on water. "My hyacinths have catch Bébé for me. I must hurry; she will wake up and be scared some more." He raised his brows at M. Bigone's staring. "Her Mamma?" He pointed his paddle. "Hyacinths hold her yonder."

Madame Bigone was frying eggs for breakfast and her guest, Madame Croisant, was slicing the bread when Monsieur came in and told his astonishing news:

"And he say her Mamma is—yonder!"

The Mesdames stood staring, fear in their faces. Behind them the eggs sputtered and popped.

"Pierre Lerot is crazy," Madame Bigone tried to say.

Monsieur shook his head as solidly as he had done last evening on the water:

"It is only for River Pierre Lerot is crazy."

They knew, all three of them, what it was they must do but only timid little Madame Croisant could say it:

"We must go look," she whispered, "we must go look for woman in M. Lerot's garden."

They went, Madame steering, Monsieur at the oars, Madame Croisant in the bows, keeping fearful lookout. They came to the empty boat and Madame Croisant said softly:

"Ah, my God." How many times had she seen it moored at the landing next her own on the other side of the Island! And the woman who had left that boat to swim ashore? Madame Croisant was answered before she could question. Across a small clear space, caught in a thicker tangle Madame saw a sunbonnet string she had helped to sew; it clung to a spike of purple blossom and flagged fitfully, without hope in its windmade mission.

"Oh, m'amie, m'amie. I pray God you are safe."

Yet even as she prayed, M. Bigone pushed his boat in among the hyacinths and Madame Croisant fell to sobbing for the sorrow of it.

"Virginia, Virginia. Ah, she had heard her papa was sick. She had come hurry to say she was sorry — Ah, m'amie, m'amie!" M. Bigone crossed himself, his Madame prayed! Clasped close to the heart of the hyacinths the woman in the garden lay white-faced and still.

M. Bigone, being her cousin, could carry Virginia's body to his house and have the masses said for her soul. But about her little five-year old daughter, what could he do?

Madame his wife, was positive that he should do something.

What if Pierre Lerot was the child's nearest living relation? What if it was in his garden that her mother had left her?

"You going *leave* baby in shack wit' old man who have no head — so little and so pretty like she is?" Madame questioned her Monsieur indignantly nearly every day of the summer that followed. And patiently in reply Monsieur stated all the points in M. Lerot's case.

"Her papa is dead. His people do not live on Island. Me, I do not know where M. Cleve's people live. Pierre is closest kin little Virginia have."

And woman of the world though she was, Madame Bigone herself could find no pretext for taking his baby away from old man Lerot, until grinding season began; then the school on the Island was opened and Madame saw her chance:

"Cher," she cried, "old man Lerot should send Virginia to school. All children should go to school — 'T is for why we pay tax."

Monsieur was dubious about it but Madame was eager:

"Go," she urged, "go quick to Pierre Lerot and say to him he must send Virginia to school."

Monsieur suggested, unwilling to go:

"Maybe it is Virginia will not wish to go to school."

"Mais non, she will not wish. And her Grandpa will not wish if she does not wish. Ma foi, it is Grandpa spoil child all time. Me, I am sorry to see my Albert go make visit wit' his Grandpa, I know

it is plenty switch I shall have to break when he come home.''

Madame Croisant who was there, seeking news of the little girl, put in gently:

''Mais, cherie. Child should go make visit wit' its Grandpa some time.''

''Oh, mais oui,'' Madame Bigone admitted hastily, ''Child must go make visit wit' its Grandpa and it must step on nail and have chill and fever and get its finger mash in door — Va, cher! Va vite! Tell old man Lerot he must send Virginia to school on Monday. And when he say he cannot make her go it is you must say:

'Eh bien, Pierre. I recken, me I better take little girl to live in my house and my Madame, she will make her go to school.' ''

Madame Croisant who had known the American teacher and his 'Cajan wife as neighbors know each other began to say:

''Maybe little Virginia will wish to go to school''—

But Madame Bigone cut her off with that wide knowledge of the world that she had acquired in her youth:

''Wish to go? Ma foi, you reckon any child on earth is going *wish* to go to school?''

So Monsieur went, and all the way across the river he was bothered by the look he had seen in M. Lerot's eyes that morning when he sold him the twenty-five cents' worth of cowpeas.

''Seem like Pierre has done all man can do,'' he said to the beautiful blue water, ''Look patch he

have wit' cowpea and rice and cabbage — every-t'ing child should wish to eat. Look goat he has got to give milk for her. Look garden he has made so she will have place to play. It is pretty, yes. And for why he should not keep her if he wish? He is closest kin she have — now Brave Bigone is dead. But my Madame'' — He tied his boat slowly:

''Maybe it is my Madame is right — little girl should be wit' woman. But look her yonder, seem like she is happy. She is clean!''

Little Virginia was clean and happy too, dancing her dolly in the shade of her shack. Pierre Lerot was watching her, pleased and proud as an old man may be, when M. Bigone came into his garden and heavily, clumsily gave the message as he understood it:

''School begin next Monday and child should go to school. 'T is for why we pay tax — 'T is so my Madame say.''

M. Lerot raised himself from spading and looked with horror into Monsieur's bothered eyes:

''But dose school teacher,'' he said sternly, ''dey beat children, yes.''

M. Bigone made no effort to deny it:

''It is so I know,'' he said unhappily.

Pierre Lerot put down his spade:

''And you t'ink I will send my Bébé to be beat?'' he demanded.

M. Bigone had no reply for this. He went on and stated the case as he had been told to state it:

''If you cannot make Virginia go to school I will

take her to my house and my Madame will make her go.''

''Make her go? *Make* my Bébé go to be beat?'' M. Lerot stood and looked into the face of the man who had the heart to say such a thing. The haze from the sugar house drew over, the silence fell. Again it was as it had been on that day of long ago when the River, cruel as she was, yet paused to catch her breath before she caved in the bank on which his sweetheart stood waiting — and waving to him. ''Make ma Bébé go to be — beat?''

M. Bigone could offer no word of comfort. It was the little girl who with her new dolly in her arms came to clasp the old man's shaking hand:

'' 'T is only bad boy who is beat,'' she said. And she explained.

''It is plenty times my Mamma has say to me. When little girl go to school she should be good little girl and learn like teacher say and she will not be beat. She will be happy and she will be *head* all the time.''

The two Messieurs stared down at the wise little maid. M. Bigone missing the 'Cajan accent of her English, marveling at this cheerful view of school, amazed. M. Lerot in swift proud joy, yet hardly able to believe. He it was who questioned:

''Teacher will not beat little girl when she go to school if little girl learn like teacher say?''

Virginia was sure of it.

'' 'T is so my Mamma say,'' she asserted, and all

unmoved by the emotions she had excited, stuck pins into her dolly with an air of motherly solicitude.

"And ma Bébé is going to be good little girl," M. Lerot said proudly, and swept her up shoulder high.

Virginia caught him about the neck:

"Mais oui," she cried and hugging him tightly, continued:

"I shall have book and lead pencil, my Grandpa! And I shall learn to read in book like papa could read — 'T is plenty time my Mamma has told me my papa could read in book, could write in book. And when it is I shall go to school, my Grandpa?"

M. Bigone turned to look once more at the picture framed in the sweet gray shade of the shack — the old head lifted to the bright baby face, — and saw the sunken eyes where gladness grew.

"He is old and all by himself and he *is* closest kin little Virginia have," he said and went down stubbornly to his boat.

Madame Bigone could not believe the story her Monsieur told.

"She was only play," she cried. *Wish* to go to school! When Monday come we will see if she wish, maybe."

And that she might make sure of it Madame took her Albert by the hand and went herself to the schoolroom door. M. Lerot was there also, unhappy enough in his heart. Many mothers had placed their little ones in this teacher's keeping, turned them over wistfully to her tender mercies but it seemed to the teacher that she had never seen such

anguish in any other eyes as she saw that morning in M. Lerot's when he brought his baby to her desk.

"She is going be good little girl," he said, forlornly.

"I am sure she will be," the teacher assured cordially.

"She is going do just like you say, going come when you say come, going sit when you say sit, ha, ma Bébé?"

"Mais oui, my Grandpa," Virginia said in French and then in English she told the teacher:

"My name is Virginia Cleve. I was five years old last month." This was just as her mother had taught her to say it and the teacher who had been struggling with broken English, French idioms and non-comprehension warmed with all her heart to this smart little girl who spoke both tongues so well.

"I shall let your little girl sit by me and help me with my French," she said pleasantly to M. Lerot, "I am sure we shall be great friends. She seems to be smart."

"Oh she is smart, yes m'am! Dere is not any ot'er little girl in world so smart like my Virginia is; ha, ma Bébé?"

Virginia said:

"Mais oui, my Grandpa," and stood complacently while M. Lerot took off her white bonnet and smoothed her tumbled ringlets with his slender 'Cajan hand all curved as it was to the clutch of pole and paddle.

"And she is going be good little girl."

"I am sure she is. You will come for her at three o'clock?"

"At t'ree o'clock. Yes, m'am. I will be at door when t'ree o'clock come. I wish you good morning, Madame. Also I wish you good luck wit' school." So Monsieur bowed himself out doing his bravest to please the teacher who, if displeased, might beat his baby. And Madame Bigone saw it all.

"C'est vrai," she said briefly to her Monsieur, "he has *start* Virginia to school. But is she going keep on go?" Madame shrugged her shoulders, and she promised herself:

"My Albert shall watch if she go every day. I shall ask him every night when he come home."

Albert did not have to be questioned. His talking was always about Virginia, how she could spell, how she could march. Albert, indeed, had fallen frankly in love with his pretty little cousin and before the week was out had hidden his own book that he might study with Virginia in hers. The teacher smiled:

"I wonder if 'Cajan boys begin to have sweethearts before they put off their baby clothes!"

Madame Bigone did not smile.

"If Albert was going to marry Virginia there was all the more reason why the little girl should be brought into her house to be raised as a girl should be raised and taught to do all manner of womanly work. And yet knowing this to be so needful, and with all her worldly wisdom called in counsel, Madame Bigone could find no further pretext for taking Virginia from under M. Lerot's care.

"If I should go see Madame Croisant, maybe," she thought. She and Madame Croisant had grown up as girl's together and her friend's tender heart had sometimes found a way when Madame's own shrewd head had failed. But the grinding season had begun and M. Bigone was a knife on the plantation. While the grinding season lasts knives do not go visiting and neither do their Mesdames.

"When grinding season close," Madame said and waited.

The season did not close that year until the first week in January; but as soon as it did close Madame went across the Island to make her visit, and as soon as she returned from that visit she took her Monsieur eagerly aside.

"Cher," she said, "when I was across Island Madame Croisant showed me Virginia's little place. It is not much place, God knows. It is little, yes! But if M. Lerot does not pay tax on it, place will go to Parish. And it should not go to Parish — it will be dot for Virginia when she is married. I wish you to go to M. Lerot and say to him as I have say to you — Place should not go to Parish. And you will say to him also, if he does not wish to pay tax, Voilà, it is you will pay tax, and you will take Virginia to live in your house."

But between M. Bigone's eyes and his Madame's eager face rose the picture framed in the shade of the shack, the pleasantness of it, the pathos:

"I reckon, me, Pierre will pay tax on Virginia's little place. Seem like he sets heap of store by her."

"He will pay if he can, yes," Madame agreed. "But how he can? How much money he make wit' his fish, ha? And all time he buy dress for Virginia, buy shoes, buy book, buy pencil, buy dolly, buy somet'ing all time! How it is he is going pay tax? Va, cher, and say to M. Lerot: 'Ah, it is already Virginia should be in my house?' And if she is going have little place for dot it will be help for Albert. It is right by Madame Croisant's place and she say to me, 'Yes, it is good land.' Va, cher. Va vite!"

M. Bigone went again across False river, going even more unwillingly than he had gone last time. His Madame was a wise woman; and yet, if he should pay the tax for old Pierre, would she be smart enough to find it out?

"She has mighty fine head," he said uneasily, "fine head, sho." To M. Lerot he said what all men in Pointe Coupée say in greeting to another man on a rainy day in January:

"Bad days for levees."

M. Lerot gave assent. He was planting a new shrub in his garden, a sweet olive and dreaming of the delight his baby would take in its fragrance when it should bloom; for in all the flowers of the garden there is no fragrance so fine as the scent of the sweet olive. Monsieur had been working all the morning that he might receive this plant in pay; but he paused only to press a little more earth about its roots and then said courteously:

"You will walk in house?"

M. Bigone walked in, heavier than ever now because his heart was so unhappy:

"I hear me, dey have crevasse yonder at Grand Bank," he said.

"Sho," said M. Lerot, "Well, water will pass in Bayou LeBlanc."

"And if dike go, it will pass in False river."

"Dike will not go," M. Lerot replied with certainty. "'T was M. Davee build dike yonder. He is young man but"—

"Sho," said M. Bigone. He knew well enough the name the young engineer had made for himself among the men of the Island. There was nothing more to say and so he said:

"Virginia's papa have little place on ot'er side of Island. Close by Madame Croisant, is where place is. My Madame say if you do not pay tax on it, place will go to Parish. She say it should not go to Parish — it will be dot for Virginia." He stopped and saw the anxious light shine in M. Lerot's eyes. Together they turned and sat over the fire. M. Lerot could not make even the passing comment politeness required. Pay tax on her little place? And there was but a single dollar left of the candle money he had saved to pay for the masses that would pray his soul out of purgatory when he died.

M. Bigone was silent also:

"He has not money to pay tax, but he shall not give up his baby no. If my Madame find out or if she does not find out I will pay tax for him."

"Eh bien, Pierre, if you have not money to pay

tax,'' M. Bigone begun bravely, ''I will pay and''—

M. Lerot started up with quick suspicion, seeing the hand of Madame Bigone at work:

''Non, non!'' he declined hastily, ''I will pay tax. Say to your Madame, Virginia's little place shall not go to parish. I will pay tax. Say to her it is tomorrow I will pay!''

M. Bigone got up and went to the door:

''Bad day for levee,'' he said, ''And it is going be bad night. Bad night, sho. I wish to know if M. Davee will hold levee yonder. I pass in road yesterday, 't is plenty nigger he have and plenty mule also. But if he will hold her''—

M. Lerot did not know when his guest left him. Sitting over the fire, seeing but the single dollar of his candle money:

''While I live I will keep ma Bébé. When I die, devil can have me if he wish.''

Yes, certainly he would take that last dollar. But it would not be enough. How much money would it take to pay the tax? Monsieur did not know. He had never paid a tax but he had heard men talk of taxes and they had always spoken unhappily, saying:

''It's the levees that makes the taxes so high. Five dollars? If it was only a little place maybe five dollars would be enough. But how was he to get the five dollars? The other four? By catching fish. It was the only way that M. Lerot had ever made money. But he could not catch four dollars' worth of fish out of False river between noon and night? Not in January, certainly, when for weeks the

weather had been wet. How then? Monsieur remembered Bayou Le Blanc. He had just said that the water coming through the crevasse at Grand Bank would make its way into that bayou and he knew that where the water of the Mississippi went the big, blue Mississippi cats went also. Standing on the dike across the mouth of Bayou Le Blanc he could easily catch four dollars' worth of fish,—and he could sell them? Yes, he could sell them on the levee where Davis the engineer had so many negroes to be fed. By the time he had finished thinking it all out M. Lerot was on top of the dike with his harpoon and lines. On his right, a dozen feet below, the waters of False river softly lapped the base of the dike, blue and very tender even on that dismal day. On his left within a foot of him pressed the water of Le Blanc, sullen, silent as the Mississippi's own. If the dike should give way now while Monsieur stood fishing there with only a dollar left to buy masses for his soul? In Pointe Coupée men do not ask such idle questions. With the sullen water swelling higher and higher they drive along the road on top of the dike and whistle as they drive. M. Lerot, knowing just how to do it, soon caught all the fish he could carry and with their big heads against his shoulder and their forked tails tapping his heels strode steadily away to the levee with its threatened crevasse and hungry hands.

Had there been a high wagon in the road with an up-ended sugar hogshead on its seat, Monsieur standing on the hogshead could have seen the River

flush with the crown of the levee. He knew this as he stood in the road but he was not thinking about it. With his eyes on the gang as they were at work strengthening the levee he was knowing the joy of a man who sees a market for the stuff he has to sell. Those lustly blacks who drove the scraper teams, the broad-backed bucks between the barrow handles:

"'T is plenty catfish nigger can eat!" He watched them for a minute in approval. Team behind team the scraper gang worked like a well oiled machine; each pair of mules in its turn wrung wither for the cut, bowed backs to the climb and when the scraper swung over dumping its load of dirt, each team with lifted heads circled down to cut and climb again. And so with the barrow gang. Every man keeping step in line ran his barrow up the plank to the crown —

"Mais, mon Dieu! uttered M. Lerot, "Dirt yonder should be put in sack. M. Davee" — he began to look about him anxiously, forgetting his fish. Where was the Boss!

On the crown of the levee stood a white man, heavily-booted, mud-covered, keen of eye. It was the man Monsieur was looking for. Wearing, but all unconscious of it, a stout stick in his boot-leg; wearing, but also unconscious of it, the marks of night-watches upon his gaunt, unshaven face, the stamp of exhaustion upon his sunken shoulders. In the drip of that cold, all-day drizzle the Boss stood watching the work and the River. There are square miles of cane that a crevasse here would wipe out

in a week, and hundreds of happy homes and fair gardens have laid the weight of their care upon his shoulders; and there are men who ride, spurring for news — If they are ruined as the world knows the word; there are women who sit waiting, wistful-eyed; and these things too were upon the Boss' shoulders. But he, standing there unconscious of the burden that was bending the brave back of him even as he was unconscious of mud and of danger, was thinking only of sacks. Sacks that should have been there and were not there. Sacks, sacks! He nodded to M. Lerot and said not unkindly:

"Want to sell that truck? Take it to the cook."

But M. Lerot had forgotten the fish, the four dollars, the tax that must be paid. His eyes were anxious.

"Excusez moi, M. Davee, if you please. Today it drizzle, tonight it will rain. You should have nigger put dirt in sack."

"Got no sacks."

"You have no sacks, Monsieur?"

"They put them off over yonder."

"Put them off on *ot'er* side!" That such a cargo, precious beyond any price in this hour of danger should have gone astray! Yet it was not to be wondered at. When the River is high, landing at weak levees is forbidden; there is confusion. Steamboat captains have to do the best they can and not infrequently do their worst.

"They'll get them across tomorrow I guess," the Boss said dryly. His heart was breaking over the

maddening delay, but a Boss may not show his heart-ache. Monsieur turned away:

"Tomorrow, Monsieur," he began. His courteous bearing broke, his eyes got bright. He had turned from the Boss toward the River and now stood facing her — in all her hideousness, in all her pitiless power.

"What about tomorrow?"

Tomorrow would be too late, but M. Lerot did not say so. The River going by had brought him memory, the smell of her mud, and madness. M. Lerot said:

"Ha, 't is me will fetch sack now. 'T is plenty mean t'ing River has do to me and you t'ink I will not beat her when I have chance to beat? Ha" — and seeing his girl again in her sweet young beauty going down with that caving bank he fell to cursing deep-toned, 'Cajan oaths that the Boss could not have understood had he been listening.

If he *could* get the sacks now—only a few hours before night, before the heavy rain began. If he could get all this loose dirt shoveled into sacks so it could not be washed away. He followed the old man who was going muttering along the levee to that stronger point where a skiff lay moored; and as he went the temptation was strong upon the Boss. One chance in a thousand, but then it was only one withering old life risked to save the prosperity of a parish. Possibly the old man had heard of the hundred dollars he had offered that morning to the man who should bring the sacks across. Every

darkey in the gangs had declined it with a respectful:

"No, t'ank you sir, Boss. When I dies I wants to die on dry land."

"But," the Boss reflected, "a hundred dollars would seem untold wealth to a 'Cajan." And having reached the skiff that M. Lerot had begun to cast loose, the Boss put his hand down firmly and said:

"See here! You can't go across that River. Look at her."

M. Lerot lifted his eyes from the knot he was untying. Above and beyond her bank, stretching from levee to levee, tawny-colored, catlike, cruel, the River swept to sea without a murmur. And as he looked upon her with hatred a gleam from a parting cloud lit her cold face as it were with exulting wickedness:

"Yes," Monsieur said in slow bitterness of utterance, "Make your smile like sin but it is me will fetch sack. Ha, you t'ink it is plenty garden you will get tonight, plenty pig, plenty people, but it is me will fetch sack." He took seat in the skiff, not seeing the Boss or heeding his protest, not knowing, indeed, that he was there. Weather-beaten, though he was, worn by life and the ways of it, with his white hair and his weight of years, M. Lerot yet put his boat's nose to the stream with a skill that made the Boss square his jaws against a quick rush of hope. That river-bred old 'Cajan who knew his Mississippi as he knew his cabin floor might be able

to do what none of those big blacks could be bribed to try.

And yet, how could any man get across!

Drifts of uprooted trees swept down with the current, wreckage of roofs, swelled cattle sucked back through the crevasse above, barrels, and broken homes. The Boss strained his eyes to follow, and after the rafts and after the roofs there was yet the frail boat stealing steadily. Monsieur had forced his way upstream to a point far above the landing opposite that he meant to reach. Now he turned into the stream and with all his weight on the downstream oar let the current carry him down on a diagonal course, his madness pitted cunningly against the River's malice and her might. The boss stood silent, staring, his hand clenched in his pockets, his feet apart. The gangs, lusty-lunged, good-humored, made careless comment on the crisis:

"He ain't gwine git across dat River, no, sur!"

"What you talkin' 'bout, nigger? Dat's old crazy Pair Layro."

"Pierre Lerot," the Boss caught the name to remember it as men remember sounds heard in an hour of anguish. But he did not know then that he heard it. Even if the empty boat should get across, what chance that it could recross loaded — driven as it would be by failing muscle and failing breath? — How white the old man's hair had been, how hollow his temples. The sky grew more gloomy as the unseen sun sank to its setting: a mutter came down the wind telling of the time there was to be that

night. Rain and wind. Always rain and wind at night when the River is high and the levees are weak. The Boss had planned this fight as a young general plans his first great battle: picked men worked with the barrow down there; picked mules walked in the collars; the latest improvements in scrapers; a big supply of food in camp — and no sacks!

He was to be defeated by another man's stupidity as many a brave man has been beaten before. But the Boss did not say this. Bitterly, broadly he blamed himself that he had not brought the sacks by wagon instead of ordering them by boat. The hours of dimming daylight went slowly, the tired teams dropped their ears, the tired men ceased to sing, and the River went on rising, lipping higher and higher at the water mark, smiling, as it were in mockery of this man-made mound. So the Boss stood with his eyes on the swift, foul flood and out of the wreck and ruin there peered at him the cold glances of ruined men. He raised his head to meet those eyes, squarely, as a man must meet the eyes of other men be his failure ever so damnable in their sight; and, doing it, met yet other eyes — the eyes of a girl, sweet, brown eyes where disappointment deepened. He had lost his first big levee. His very first. The Boss began to feel the weight of the stick in his boot-leg, the load of the mud on his boots, his shoulders sagged heavily as he turned his eyes away.

"Fo God, Boss. Look yonder!"

"My Lord, what a load!"

Sacks! Sacks enough to swamp a boa! Sacks enough to save a levee! Fresh as a boy from his bed the Boss gave eager order; with the ready response of their race, fagged hand and fresh hand flung themselves into the fight; and M. Lerot panting on the verge of victory let his breath go in hoarse, wild laughter, mocking in hate and hoarded vengeance the River he had beaten. But through all the stir and taunting the River went, smiling softly, upon her wide and wicked way. M. Lerot was clear of her current but between her shore and his loaded boat was an eddy, new-made since morning. The River knew and then M. Lerot knew it also. With the levee only a few feet away the nose of the heavy boat was caught in the eddy's noose and Monsieur and his saving sacks went circling slowly outward toward the stream of never ending raft and roof. Let M. Lerot bend his old back so madly as he might, let him strain the muscles of his heaving chest, the breath he had flung away in that foolish laugh was gone. The River would play with him like the cat she was and then carrying him down mocking in malice at the vengeance he had planned. M. Lerot sunk his blades deep and prayed, knowing well enough in his madness what god to pray to and what pledge to offer upon that god's altar.

"Oh, Wind," he prayed, "Oh, Wind, blow wit' me now and you may blow away all I have in world."

And the wind with a great guffaw came out of the farther west, sent a shiver through the River,

set a shoulder to the boat. There would be wild work tonight, black rain and battle: the wind laughed as it lent that hand. But then, other hands were lent also. First the hand of a determined white man swimming to the edge of the eddy making fast a hawser to that reeling boat and after it, hands black and brawny that pulled on the rope like horse-power.

The Boss thrust money upon M. Lerot, the Blacks lifted him and set him aside. Sacks were what they wanted and sacks were what they had. The Boss had not had his boots off for twenty-four hours, would not have them off for twenty more to come. The sacks were filled with dirt and stacked along the levee's crown, the stacks rising faster than even the River rose. Haste, fierce anguish of impatience and a vision: — Through the rush of rain and action, a woman's waiting face —

"If I could only get word to her that I have the sacks!"

M. Lerot left alone upon its slope stumbled down the levee to the road. Going home as a dog goes, rain-beaten, blown upon, weak from his frenzy, — so Monsieur fared on with the night.

"My Grandpa, my Grandpa."

Monsieur's stumbling steps swung into a stride, his voice sang out in cheer:

"Reste tranquile, ma Bébé. Your grandpa is come' to you." He fondled her in the firelight, the little girl that had been forgotten and left lonesome in the dark; and fondling her found the money in his

hand. Virginia counted the shining new .bills There were ten of them.

"'T is money to pay tax, ma Bébé," he said. "Plenty money your Grandpa has get for you." He laughed, and the little girl laughed also, hugging him tight, exulting to have him home again:

"My Grandpa is big man," she crowed. So they nestled in the firelight, very happy, while the wind wandered about the world willing enough it seemed to wait for the prize that had been pledged.

## CHAPTER II

# The Wind

WITH wild bright eyes and an air of reckless glee, the red-headed boy walked up to the teacher's desk.

"I am come to school, me," he said.

"What is your name?" asked the teacher, following the formula.

"Le Vent."

"Le vent—your *name*! Le Vent means the wind." She spoke with certainty, for little Virginia had coached her carefully in 'Cajan French. "Your name cannot be The Wind."

The new boy received her protest politely—just smiling; and the teacher remembered that it is not for any sane being to say what may or may not be a 'Cajan boy's name. She called Virginia to her and questioned:

"Doesn't Le Vent mean The Wind?"

"Yes, m'am." M. Lerot's baby, very dainty in her nice new clothes, very demure in the dignity of her seven years, gave the answer with reassuring serenity. The teacher questioned more boldly:

"Did you ever hear of a boy being called The Wind?"

Virginia quoted her highest authority:

"Albert calls him Le Vent."

The red-headed boy cut in with gay derision:

"Albert Bigone? Tête-bleu! He's fool, yes. I got name in church, but Albert don't know. He is fool"—

Virginia shut him up with sharp English:

"Albert is not a fool. He knows plenty more than you know. He has been coming to school for two years, and you! This is the very first day you have come to school."

Le Vent looked delighted upon the rage he had roused:

"Where you get your pretty eye, ha?"

"Here, be still, both of you. Virginia, you may go to your seat. Now. Do *you* know what the name is that you have in church?"

Le Vent, looking after Virginia in heedless glee, gave over the milder joy of plaguing the teacher:

"Yes, I know. It is François—François Crevecour." And without waiting for the further formula—

"I got t'irteen years, me."

The teacher made the entries and Le Vent had been enrolled in the Island school to be indeed as a wind in it; distracting the studious quiet with his careless commotions; laying waste its fertile fields of learning; stripping the leaves from its stately trees of knowledge. The whole school suffered, but it was Virginia who came in for the Wind's worst plaguing. To tease her until her big eyes flashed was the crowning joy of François's impish day. Albert Bigone defended her. He was not only Virginia's cousin, but her lover also. And so it happened that when Madame Croisant came on her next visit, she found

Madame Bigone grim and skeptical as they battled the wash at the water's edge.

"School," she said, taking up a polite question of Madame Croisant's. "School. Ma foi, it is trouble school is. All time it is fight on road, get whip by teacher. Fight on road some more; get whip by teacher some more. And what good it do?"

Madame Croisant set her head sideways, considering the question—and the ink on a shirt.

"Child will learn to read in book, maybe?" she suggested.

"Read in book!" Madame Bigone repeated passionately. "Read in book! And what good *it* do? When I was in world, Madame I was wit' *she* read in book, read plenty, yes. 'T is all time she is read. One day she cry and say to me:

" 'Ah, Marie, I feel so sorry for dese poor people!'

"I say to her, me:

" 'Dey is kin wit' you, Madame? Dose poor people?'

"And she say:

" 'Oh, mais non. Dey is only play people.'

"Me, I don't say not'ing but I t'ink somet'ing, yes. Ma foi! 'T is plenty people in world woman can cry for wit'out cry for *play* people. And I t'ink aussi, if Madame was not read in book so much maybe it is she would not have to pay me so much money to mind baby for her—to mend dress for her. But no! When woman learn to read in book, look like she get wind in head. She blow here, she blow dere; she will not work. Look little Virginia yonder. 'T is

already she can read in book. She is big friend wit' my Albert, but me, I am not proud for it, no. When woman can read in book, you reckon she is going work in garden?''

Madame Croisant looked across False river in quick alarm. There in the shade of the shack she saw something that might have been a little girl reading a book, and her 'Cajan heart felt fear. A life that passes idly as the wind passes can bring forth only waste places. Madame Croisant knew that even as she knew her religion:

''Mais, M. Lerot,'' she cried, ''M. Lerot should make Virginia work.''

Madame Bigone answered drily out of her worldly-wisdom:

''Make her? Ain't he old and all by himself in shack? What it is he going wish to make Virginia do? Voilà. It is love him like he was her grandpa—vrai!''

Madame Croisant was thinking of that cabin near her own, and of the small farm where the American teacher had tried so hard to make a living 'Cajan fashion for his 'Cajan wife. Tried, and failed, and died, leaving his wife and little daughter to make a living for themselves.

''Virginia's papa work—and he read in book. And her mamma also could read in book, but she work—work plenty.''

Madame Bigone shrugged her shoulder and shifted her argument:

''Mais oui, American blood will work some; 'Cajan

blood will work plenty; but when you mix American wit' 'Cajan, you get lazy blood,—it will not work, no!''

''But Virginia must work, she shall not be lazy. 'T is plenty I love Virginia Cleve and you t'ink I will sit and see old man spoil her little girl. I shall go to him, I shall say to him if he does not wish little girl to be like wind is he must give little girl her job and he must make her do job!'' And being nervous and thin and not at all sure of her courage, Madame Croisant dried her hands, pulled down her skirts and cried:

''You will lend me pirogue, if you please. It is *now* I will go! It is *now* I will say!''

Only two years since he had turned the sod, already the flowers were growing tall in the garden M. Lerot had promised to make for his baby. Madame Croisant waiting among them wondered at the way the flowers had grown. Yet the wide yellow eyes of the jonquils were wistful as with long wishing:

''And what it is you wish?''

Ah, but was not Madame wishing it also—that the mother were here to watch over her baby girl?

The roses, blood-red beside the door reproved her. So long had she been in coming. So long—nearly two years.

Timid as she was about intruding upon another's house and home, Madame could not linger long in that wistfulness of wishing and waiting. She moved on around the shack and so came upon M. Lerot milking the goat.

Monsieur got up from his knees; gave Madame courtly greeting and invited politely:

"You will walk in house, if you please?"

Madame walked into the house, glancing about eagerly for some saving sign of childish strength tiptoeing to its task. But the cover lay smoothly upon the bed, the chair sat straight against the wall and the floor showed no skipped places in its sweeping. Did this old man in his pride and devotion require nothing indeed of his baby? Nothing but play and the idle reading of books? Madame Croisant could not believe it. She did not know of the prayer Monsieur had made to the wind, nor of the pledge he had given it. There is work, she thought, in both garden and yard that a little girl could be trusted to do more safely than the more costly care of a house. She took the chair M. Lerot set forth and said kindly:

"I wished to see how your little Virginia was coming on. Her mamma and me, we were great friends!"

M. Lerot thought at once of Madame Bigone. First it had been the school, then the tax. What pretext had she plotted now for taking his baby away from him? He asked anxiously:

"And how you t'ink she is look', Madame? Ma Bébé?"

The tone and the light in his eyes touched Madame's tender heart. She remembered that Monsieur had planted cowpeas. She would not have wounded him for any gift of gold. She cried cordially:

"How I t'ink she is look'? Tudieu, Monsieur! I t'ink she is look' fine. 'T is how everybody must t'ink

who look at *her,*" she drew the little girl to her knee:

"It is great care your Grandpa take wit' you, is it not, Bébé?"

Virginia left her hand in Madame Croisant's, and answered gently in French:

"Mais oui, Madame."

"Mais oui," Madame echoed encouragingly. "He give you nice dress and pretty dolly, he make you garden, he milk goat for you, he plant cowpea. 'T is plenty he do! And what it is you do all day, ah, ma Bébé?"

Virginia answered this nice little Madame nicely:

"I go to school," she said.

"C'est bien," Madame encouraged some more. "And when you come from school, petite, what it is you do, ah?"

"I make my dolly go to school," she warmed to the nice Madame and began to tell eagerly:

"I make my dolly go to school. I make her say 'A'; I make her march"—she stopped. Her Grandpa was listening in delight, but the nice Madame was shaking a sorrowful head:

"Non, non, ma Bébé. When little girl come from school she should run quick to help her Grandpa wit' work in garden; run quick to pick up stick to cook supper; run *quick* to pull grass for goat; run *quick* to fetch broom to sweep house"—

Virginia's large eyes were getting larger and larger as Madame rushed on with this appalling catalogue of virtues. M. Lerot hastily interposed:

"Mais, Madame! Virginia is only *little* girl. Ah, ma Bébé?"

Virginia assented with sweet relief:

"Mais oui, my Grandpa."

Madame Croisant shook the more sorrowful head:

"Monsieur, Virginia is only little girl like you say, but she is not too little to help you wit' work. I know plenty little girl who pick up stick to start fire, and pull grass in garden, and mind baby for mamma. You should make her help you, Monsieur. If she does not learn to clean house when she is little girl, when she grows to be woman she will not know how to clean house. And to sweep yard, to scrub house, to keep everyt'ing clean,—it is for why le bon Dieu has made woman, Monsier."

With gentle dignity, little Virginia freed her hand from Madame's clasps and walked out the back door cuddling her dolly. Madame Croisant looked after her unhappily:

"Monsieur," she said earnestly, "it is better for little girl to be lying dead in grave dan to be growing up in garden, doing not'ing. If you wish me to take her in my house"—

M. Lerot started in his chair. This was what Madame Bigone was up to now:

"Madame," he cut in with decision, "I t'ank you, no! It is plenty t'ing Virginia do. She go to school, she read in book, she make dress for her dolly— 't is fine how she can sew"—

But Madame could only shake her head more and more sorrowfully as that list lengthened:

"To do what one *wish* to do, Monsieur, is not to work. Wind will blow as it wish to blow. It is so Bible say: 'Le vent souffle où il veut.' Do you wish Virginia to grow to be like le vent?"—

"Le Vent!" M. Lerot sprang up in passion, tall for all he was so stooped. He towered above Madame Croisant, his eyes blazing, his voice deep with rage:

"Le vent! François Crevecour. Nom de Dieu! You would name ma Bébé wit' *him*? Mechant! Chaud-tête"—

"Mais, Monsieur," Madame cried, too scared to know what she was saying, "François is not chaud-tête, he is white"—

"He is wild, he is bad! Le Vent? Mais oui, he is Le Vent! And you would name ma Bébé"—

"Oh, Monsieur, I did not mean—I know your baby is good little girl. I know she is smart—pretty"—

But Monsieur had no more courtesy for her speaking. With burning eyes and pointing hand, he stood in attitude of dismissal, and Madame Croisant with bowed head went out to meet again the jonquils' wistful eyes:

"Already," she sobbed to the flowers. "Already wind is in his garden. And when he find wind is here, what it is he will do? What it is he can do? God knows! God knows!" She went away, very unhappy in her heart, bearing with her a fear of M. Lerot that was to shut her away from the little girl whose mother she had loved:

How tall the old Monsieur had looked in his anger, how terrible!

Monsieur's anger, being 'Cajan rage, passed as swiftly as it had come, leaving him weak and wretched in the presence of his fresh alarms. It was Madame Bigone who had sent this friend of hers to his shack:

"All time she is try to take ma Bébé from me." He was so shaken that the words were as a sob in his throat; but he was still a 'Cajan, and while there was a breath left in that bent old body of his, Monsieur would fight for his own. He went out to the shade where his little girl sat at play:

"Ma Bébé," he said wistfully, "you would wish now to pick some stick to make fire?"

Virginia, dancing her dolly, answered sweetly:

"Mais non, my Grandpa."

"You would not wish?" How pretty she was! But then, if he was to keep her she must learn to work. "You would not wish? But you would wish to pull grass for goat, maybe?"

Virginia had no doubt about it:

"Mai non, my Grandpa!"

"You would not wish," he said unhappily. "But, ma Bébé, it is so—Madame say good little girl should do."

Virginia dropped the dolly, her lip quivered:

"You think I am not a good little girl, my Grandpa?"

M. Lerot went down on his knees:

"Mais oui, ma Bébé. I know you are good little girl. In all de world dere is not any ot'er little girl so good like my little girl is."

Virginia sobbed out her unhappiness in the hollow of his throat:

"It will make my hand dirty to pull grass, it will make my dress dirty. I do not wish to be dirty like Mathilde is. Albert say she is slick like mud so dirty she is."

"And you shall not be dirty, ma Bébé. Your Grandpa wish you to keep your hand clean and your dress clean. It makes him proud to see his Bébé clean all time. Look star yonder. Come, say pretty words for your Grandpa."

The little girl turned her big wet eyes up to the first faint star as she did every evening to please him and said prettily:

"Des ètoiles me parlent à esperance; me parlent à Dieu."

But when his baby was in bed and Monsieur had gone to the edge of the batture where the garden he had made stooped to kiss the garden his God had given him, Monsieur stared up at the stars and the stars stared down at Monsieur and spoke to him neither of heaven nor of hope:

"Dose Mesdames," the old man said, "all time dey wish to take ma Bébé. And dey shall not take. When she say to me again:

" 'Your little Virginia work, ah?'

"I will say to her:

" 'Mais oui, Madame! Ma Bébé work plenty.'

"But if ma Bébé does not wish to get her hands dirty she shall not get her hands dirty. 'T is heap I can lie if I wish to lie. While I live I will live;

when I die, devil can have me if he wish. T'ank God, it is on ot'er side of False river Madame Bigone live! And I will watch out. All time I will watch out.''

And when Monsieur had made an end of his vowing, he heard the voice of one walking in his garden and knew of it how it was an uneasy voice that would now be always there breathing a cold breath upon its sweetness, shaking its repose; yet he did not know that it was the voice of the Wind.

## CHAPTER III

# The Wind in the Garden

M. LEROT watched out—while his garden grew in beauty even as his baby grew. Whenever he went across the Island to collect the rent for Virginia's little place and met Madame Croisant at her gate, timid, yet full of eager inquiry, M. Lerot had his answer ready. Indeed, his baby was "doing fine." Growing to be a great girl, busy always with work about the house and yard, a great help to him, a comfort, a crowning joy.

Madame Croisant eagerly retold all this to Madame Bigone and Madame Bigone received it without gainsaying. Not so much because she believed as because she was bothered about something Le Vent had flung at her one day after she had driven him indignantly from her water-melon patch:

"C'est bien, Madame. You t'ink I would not rat'er have little green book M. Lerot have in pocket dan every big green melon you have in patch, ha? Your Albert t'ink he is going get little green book for himself, but, me, I know who it is going get book, yes!"

Now Madame Bigone knew what a little green book meant. The sugar-planter's wife had kept such a book in a top drawer, and had told her to be careful of it, as it meant money in bank. But that old man Lerot should have money in bank, Madame Bigone

could not at first believe. She knew nothing at all about the hundred dollars Monsieur had won by that fight with the River, but she knew to a nickle how much rent he received for Virginia's small farm. It was not much, but if he hoarded every cent of it?

"It would be somet'ing, yes."

Did he save it? The bank was in Bouge Vache and Le Vent's father spent most of his time in Bouge Vache shooting craps with the roustabouts at the landing. Le Vent might have learned about the green book from his father; and then, again, Le Vent might be lying.

The only way in which Madame might get at the truth of it was to watch Le Vent himself—if he was in earnest about being Albert's rival for Virginia's favor. Madame watched Le Vent, watched him through Albert's eyes, watched him with her own; and the longer she watched, the more uneasy she grew. It was not only because he wasted where he would not work that the Island had nicknamed François Crevecour as it had; but also because, like the Wind, he had a trick of taking boldly whatever he chose to take.

And if in his headlong, handsome way he made up his mind to marry Virginia, what would she do? Madame knew moments of intolerable uneasiness:

"When a girl have some 'Cajan, some American, what she will do, God knows!" But year by year it became to Madame more apparent that even Virginia's American blood would not hesitate in making choice between the wild beauty of the Wind and her

own splendid son. And at last quite sure of herself and of her worldly wisdom she answered Madame Croisant's incredible accounts of Virginia, saying:

"All money M. Lerot get for rent he put in bank to be dot for Virginia."

They were sitting in the crowd that had gathered for the closing exercises of the school, a crowd that leaned and looked to see Virginia crowned queen of May.

Before Madame Croisant could give whisper in return for whisper, Monsieur Bigone spoke in his slow, heavy way:

"And today make nine year."

"Nine years," Madame Croisant repeated softly.

For a moment Madame Bigone forgot the little green book and François Crevecour's boast. Just nine years since they three had gone down into the tangled places of M. Lerot's garden seeking what they should find, and, having found, had borne it home, white, and still in the bottom of their boat.

But for a moment only might Madame forget it. Albert and François were both paying court to the new-crowned queen and which one would carry her away from the crowd? Albert, who knew not of the green book, or François who did? Madame, watching, began to smile; then she put her hand on the knee of the dreaming Madame Croisant:

"Look my big brown boy yonder!"

Albert was rather masterfully leading Virginia away, following the curving bank. Had he not always pointed the path that she should follow—ever since

they were little folk in the primary grade together? Madame felt sure of the answer. She said to her friend:

"I reckon, me, Virginia know who her old man is going be." And she added with complaisance:

"Before, I have never hear of girl on Island who have money in bank for dot."

Virginia knew, certainly, why she had been brought to this sheltered bend and seated on this soft green bank, and why Albert was standing near her awkward and dumb; and her French blood rose gallantly to meet the nervous moment.

"Look," she laughed merrily and pointed to Albert's reflection in the clear water, "Look how tall you grow when you stand on your head."

Albert was a stanch fellow and held stubbornly to his purpose.

"How you like to be queen, ha?"

"Oh, je suis enchanteé! I find it nice."

"You would like to be queen all time maybe?"

"And wear crown like this on my head?"

This was not the kind of queenhood Albert had meant to offer. Looking down on her pretty head, loving her, longing for her, he set himself manfully to make his meaning clear.

"Non," he explained tenderly, "not to wear crown on head, Virginia. Madame could not wear crown, it would fall off when she work."

"Work," Virginia said, and with the word came the picture that she always saw at the sound of that word—a red-faced woman with straggling hair,

sweating, barefooted, her legs streaked with dirty water; her skirts drawn to the knees, yet draggled from scrubbing. Having never worked, Virginia knew nothing of the joy of making things clean—nothing of the inner glow only work may give. All she knew about work was the repulsive aspect of its outer grime, and she answered Albert with indignation and disgust:

"Work! You think I would work?"

"But yes," Albert said, seeing no reason for her disdain. According to Albert's teaching, work was a man's main object in life and a woman's also. "But yes, you would work if you were Madame—wit' house to keep clean, and garden"—

Virginia cut in with composure:

"Never!"

"Jamais?" Albert repeated. He began to expostulate, using the tone he had used so many times to turn her wilfulness into the way that it should go:

"All Mesdames on Island work," he said, " 'T is so a Madame must do—bake, scrub, clean garden."

At each enumeration, Virginia recalled a memory of them, those hard-working 'Cajan Mesdames of the Island who have such sweet clean houses and such gay sweet gardens. They stood forth at Albert's words,—flushed, drabbled, dank and acrid.

"I would not do it," she said, "I would not be like that for anything."

Albert stood staring down at her, astounded.

"You would not—work," he said slowly. "Mais who would scrub house if Madame did not.—And

where would I get bread if my Madame did not bake it for me?''

Virginia laughed gaily as she had so often laughed at the dear old boy's stupidity:

''I don't know,'' she said.

But this time Albert did not laugh to her laughing.

''You should know, Virginia,'' he returned earnestly. ''You should t'ink. You reckon any man on Island would wish to make marry wit' girl who would not make bread for him? Me, I would not wish to make marry''—But here Albert got red in the face and looked so wretched that Virginia asked demurely:

''And with whom it is you would not wish to make marry, Albert?''

Albert got redder yet and more awkward, but stood solidly upon the stand he had taken. Comfort, order, contentment could come to man and woman only through work well done. Albert knew that, even as Madame Croisant knew it, as every 'Cajan Monsieur or Madame must know it, and he told Virginia so, saying simply and most unhappily:

''I could not make marry wit' girl who would not bake bread for me.''

Virginia shrugged deliciously. For nine years she had tempted and teased his devotion, but never reached the end of it.

''Eh bien, M. Albert. Pretty soon you will be a man, and it is for a man to say with whom he will make marry—'T is not for—somebody.''

But Albert had not withdrawn that far. He was

still certain that there was only one girl that he could marry. He denied emphatically.

"Non. It is not for man to say wit' who he will make marry."

Virginia's glance went up to him in sweet surprise:

"It is not for man to say? Then for whom is it?"

Albert told her soberly:

"It is for girl to say."

"Girl!" Virginia laughed merrily at the ridiculous notion. "Girl! A girl cannot say anything."

"She can say somet'ing," Albert insisted seriously. "She can say yes, maybe. She can say non—Man cannot make marry wit' girl if she say non to him."

Virginia disposed lightly of this difficulty:

"But if a man does not wish for a girl to say 'non' to him he should not let her do it. A girl will say as a man says if the man will only say loud enough. Pas vrai?"

And now, as it always did, that rolling "r" drew Albert closer to the girl he loved:

"Ah, she has just been play' wit' me," he said, impatient at his own denseness. He smiled tenderly and submitted:

"So you t'ink if I should say loud and plenty to you, girl must work if she wish to be a woman, if I should say it t'ousand times, you would say it also? Voilà, cherie"—

But all Virginia's ugly images were up again at the word, shutting her from the eagerness and tenderness of her lover's eyes:

"No, I would not say it. Not if you should say

it ten thousand times. Work is dirty and I will not do it.''

'' 'T is dirty, yes,'' Albert agreed, then he argued. ''Mais man must work if he wish to have. And look how it is, Virginia. Man work, he get somet'ing, he go wash and, voilà! He is clean and he have.''

Virginia looked down at the water, and its reflection. Heretofore she had seen Albert in clean clothes only, the clothing of the school and the church. Now, by the light of his own words she saw him as she had seen other laboring men—with mud-covered boots, clinging shirt, dead-tired, dirty and dull.

Her playfulness fell away from her as she sat looking at that image in the water.

''I should think,'' she said slowly, ''I should think a man could make a living without getting dirty—my Grandpa can.''

But Albert had thought of an illustration that would make all things clear to this little girl that he loved. He set it forth eagerly:

''You t'ink, m'amie, man can have if he does not get dirty—some. You are girl—you do not know? Mais voici M. Davee yonder. Smartest man in Pointe Coupée! 'T is plenty times he has beat River. When everybody is say', 'Levee gone!' M. Davee he stand dere in mud. He does not sit down to eat; he does not lie down to sleep. He fight, fight. It is dirty he gets, God knows. But he win!'' Albert rested his case triumphantly; for, indeed, whatever Davis, the civil engineer, did, every other man should be glad and proud to do.

Virginia had her own hero and a case of her own in evidence.

"My Grandpa does not get dirty," she said, "and it is plenty he has. Prettiest garden, cleanest house"—

Albert interrupted:

"He clean house *himself*, your Grandpa!"

Virginia had never taken thought of this. The house was always clean, and she had never questioned who cleaned it.

Albert demanded sternly:

"You let him—old man like he is—you let him scrub floor? Well, me, I am ashamed for you. Shamed, yes."

"Shamed, ha? And it is so you would talk to queen? Well, me, I am shamed for you! Shamed, yes." There was no indignation in the reproof, only laughter, mocking, merry, wind-shaken as it were with careless glee. Albert could have taken Le Vent down and beaten him for his intrusion, but how can a man make war with the wind? Le Vent leaned over Virginia and raised her to her feet:

"Ah, ma reine," he sighed as he led her away, "I am sorry for you, sorry, yes. When smart man like Albert get shame—C'est terrible, oui! And for why he should be so shamed, maybe?"

Virginia had no thought of confiding in the Wind. She set his comforting lightly aside:

"Oh, well," she said, "Albert can be silly sometimes."

"Oh, mais oui," François agreed, "he can be silly

sometime, he can be fool wit'out much trouble. Any man can be fool, it is easy to be fool.''

''But for M. François, it is easy to be smart?''

''Oh, mais oui. It is easy for me to be smart. I have head like my papa.''

''And your papa has fine head, maybe?''

''But, yes! Tête-bleu, you do not know. Not any man on Island has head so fine like my papa have. Look ot'er men go sweat in sun, go dig wit' hoe, go dig wit' spade. My papa does not dig, he does not sweat. Ot'er men go plant cowpea and pick cowpea and sell cowpea to make money—and it is *little* money, yes. My papa does not plant and he does not pick, but it is plenty money he make.''

Virginia gave over her mocking and began to listen. She was right then. A man could make a living without getting dirty. She looked, interested, into Le Vent's eyes and noted what a bright brown they were and how little red flecks like fire jumped about in them while he talked.

''And you t'ink I will be fool and go sweat in sun like my mamma say? Ecoutez, Virginia!'' And Le Vent leaned nearer. ''I have some money, my mamma does not know. I have skinned dead cow, I have skinned alligator. Tomorrow I am going buy me fast horse and go ride into Bogue Vache like my papa ride. And I am going make money wit'out work like my papa does. And you, why you cannot go wit' me? You have money also?''

''No,'' Virginia denied indifferently. ''I haven't any money.''

François smiled at her simplicitly:

"Maybe, but you have little green book."

"Yes," Virginia assented absently. She was thinking of Albert and his argument. "Yes, I have a little green book."

"And we will go live in Bogue Vache. If my papa can live wit'out working, you and me, we can live also."

Virginia answered out of her thinking:

"And my grandpa, he does not work."

"Your grandpa? Oh, I reckon he work when you go abroad—I have see him when I pass. Voilà, ma reine. I will come to gate wit' fast horse. We will go to priest, we will live yonder in Bogue Vache, we will sing, we will laugh"—

But Virginia was looking past him with troubled eyes. Wast it true that her Grandfather worked while she was away from home? Worked, as she had seen the women on the Island work—and the men also?

## CHAPTER IV

# The Weeping by the Water

"François Crevecour! He can lie plenty, yes," Madame Bigone said deeply, "but it is not me will believe his lie, no!"

"No?" Madame Croisant repeated with sympathy. She had not an idea what it was all about, but Madame Bigone was wounded and Madame was her friend. It was the morning after the Maypole and a Saint's day. The two Mesdames were washing the dishes in a hurry that they might have time to dress for church.

"Little green book," Madame explained with wrath, "it was one of his lie"—

"Mais non!"

"Mais oui. How I know! Voilà! Is it not hundred times I have say to you when 'Cajan blood is mixed wit' American blood it make lazy blood? Is it not hundred times I have say it?"

Madame Croisant, polishing a plate, considered it:

"It is plenty times, yes."

"Plenty time, God knows!" Madame Bigone caught up the admission eagerly. She had been duped, but not by Madame Croisant. It was the Wind that had played with her and out of her full heart Madame began—not to tell it, but to talk:

"And what I say, is it not true? Look Virginia yonder. She has been big friend wit' my Albert.

Me, I was not proud for it. Mais boy should make marry where he love, and it is not for any mamma to say where boy is going love. I could not say anyt'ing, me, but I could watch.—You see how I was watch yesterday? I watched Albert go wit' Virginia, I watch him come tout-seul. I watch him leave crowd and go home. I said to myself:

"'My God, I wish to know what it is he is going do?'

"I come home, I find Albert in field working like he is crazy. I say to myself:

"'Pretty soon he will be hungry and come to house, and I know.' But Albert does not come to supper. I wait in kitchen till it is dark; till his papa has go to sleep. I go to his door and say easy:

"'Mon garçon?'

"And he say:

"'Me voici, mamma.'

"I go in, I sit by him. Albert? Long time he does not say anyt'ing, but me I keep sit in dark by him. And when I have been sit plenty by him, Albert say to me, slow like:

"'Mais, mamma, man should not make marry wit' girl who will not work. How he can have house? How he can have garden? Man should not make marry wit' girl who will not bake bread for him.'

"I say to him:

"'But no, he should not.' And I tell him, me:

"'Man would be crazy to make marry wit' girl who would not bake bread for him. Where he would get his bread, maybe?'

"Albert raise upon his elbow and he say slow some more:

" 'Mamma, work is not dirty t'ing?'

"I tell him:

" 'Mon fils, le bon Dieu work when he make world. It is so fat'er say.'

"Albert does not say anyt'ing, just stay rest' on his elbow, look' out t'rough door at stars shine in sky, so I ask him, me, how it is he know Virginia would no bake bread for him, and he answer he like he is sick:

" 'She tell it me. She say work is dirty, she would not do it for anyt'ing in world. And she say her grandpa he does not get dirty and he have every-t'ing man should have—clean garden, clean house. Mamma, can man have if he does not work?'

"I tell him: 'Non, non, man cannot.' And I t'ink quick:

"It is lie Le Vent has been tell. If old man Lerot has been pay nigger woman to wash his clothes, to scrub his house, it is not any money he have in bank, no. And I make my swear to God, Albert shall not play fool for François Crevecour to laugh. I say to him:

" 'Mon fils, voilà Mathilde. For why you do not go wit' her to church tomorrow? I know me it is not any ot'er girl on Island work like Mathilde work. It is clean garden and clean house and plenty good bread you would have. For why you should wish to walk wit' girl when only t'ing she can do is school and sew?' "

"School and sew," Madame Croisant cried unhappily. "But m'amie, it is plenty M. Lerot has tell"—

"It is plenty he has lie. Look Virginia's finger, how white it is. If she had money in bank, c'est bien. But if she has not money in bank, man would be fool to make marry wit' her."

"But if she love Albert," Madame Croisant cried, conscience-stricken and distressed, "if she love Albert and if he love her? Ah, I will go to her and show her how it is. Girl should be proud to work for boy when she love him. She does not know, she is young"—

"Young?" Madame Bigone denied it indignantly. "She is most fifteen. When I was old as she is, it is t'ree mont' I had been married."

"Ah," Madame Croisant begged, "I will go to her, I will talk, I will tell her how it is wit' her mamma. Soon as we come from church I will go to her. Je vous prie, do not send Albert to Mathilde today."

Madame Bigone kept silent. Albert was already leaving the house in his nicest clothes. Whether he were going to Mathilde or not, how was she to know?

Virginia knew. Alone in a boat together she had seen Albert and Mathilde skirt the hyacinths and pass on toward the church. Her cheeks were hot and her eyes burning as she stood there alone in her garden. It was a beautiful garden: under the roses grew beds of violets, now mats of dark blue sweetness, and the edges of the beds were fringed with richest green—narcissus and jonquils. A spike of white

flowers or a bunch of bright yellow lingered here and there to star the fringes with their beauty. A little garden, but so very lovely. There were no cabbages in it, no onions. Nothing but fair flowers and delicate odors. M. Lerot had worked many a moonlight night for the sake of hearing his darling's cry of delight when she should wake next morning; worked many a schoolday in the grounds of the big plantations for pay in cutting and bulbs, and perhaps a rooted shrub,—thinking nothing of the hours that bent his old back to the sun, caring nothing for the miles he trudged, only that in all Pointe Coupèe there might be found no other garden so rich as his baby's garden, no blooms more beautiful, no plant more rare. And how he had been paid for it with kisses and love and sweet words of wonder. The japonica that she had watched so joyously while her grandfather coaxed it into glossy green was just now putting on its crown of crimson; but though Virginia stood staring at it, she was not seeing it. The air about her sank yearning with the fragrance of the sweet olive and the rose. Virginia's nostrils quivered, but not with delight in the delicate odors. Albert was by now walking into church with Mathilde. And all the Mesdames were lifting their brows, and the young girls looking to see where Virginia was—all smiling discreet smiles. And the Messieurs.—There would be no Messieurs at church to check the laugh. They would be taking advantage of the holiday to go out to the River and ask M. Davis if the dike was going to hold. The late rise was on, the River very high, but everybody knew

the dike would hold, M. Davis had said it would. The Messieurs, Virginia thought resentfully, just wanted an excuse to go out there and talk to M. Davis. He was on the dike himself because it was a threatened point and because—Virginia did not know what other reasons the civil engineer had for being on the dike. She knew that Albert, her Albert was sitting in the church with Mathilde while everybody smiled and wondered. M. Lerot had gone fishing, so Virginia was alone in this garden of hers that was so sweetly plotted and set together. She had plenty of time to think, but what could she think? Last night after she had said her words to the star she had lingered here and thought of Albert, and wondered if one could not work without getting so dirty as the Mesdames got. The only women she knew who were always clean were the wives of the planters who had negro women to cook and clean and care for them. These women were always clean with white hands and fair, cool faces like flowers. But then, it seemed to Virginia, there might be something more worth while than white hands.—Albert—she had always loved him. No other boy's hand ever felt as his hand felt when it clasped hers, large and warm and yet so gentle; no other boy's eyes ever looked as his eyes looked when they met hers in the deep, glad greeting—and he was sitting in church with Mathilde. The girl they used to laugh together about because she got so dirty—that trick he had of throwing his head up and laughing straight out from his heart! And yet to think of Albert's laughter now was to think

of other laughter, intolerable to hear. She who had reigned a queen yesterday with her tinsel crown, who had always been petted and bowed to, the class leader at school, the teacher's friend—how could she bear to be laughed at now, because her best boy friend had got mad and thrown her over for another girl? And they would laugh!

Like an echo to her shamed and startled thought laughter came leaping to Virginia through her garden, wind-shaken, reckless, the laughter of Le Vent:

"Eh bien, ma reine! You have been watching bird build nest in bush yonder. For why you should stand look so much? You do not know for why you stand stare plenty? Maybe it is boat you have been watch. You do not know what it is you going do to fool yonder? But, me, I know. You are going go wit' me like I say to you yesterday. Voilà, my fast horse is at gate and, me, I am on knees to you!"

Indeed Le Vent was smart enough as he had boasted. His time was chosen shrewdly. Flushed with his first luck at craps he was kneeling among her pretty flowers, radiant as a sun-shot breeze; Albert stood afar off holding Mathilde's hand, and Virginia was all alone in this her first moment of stung and startled womanhood.

"We must hurry, ma reine, before your Grandpa come. You will give me my answer now." François had told his life-plan over and over again, painting a life of ease for her, pleading. And now as the boat came back around the bend he begged an answer.

Virginia gave it to him, watching the boat where

brown hands held fast together, hearing the mocking, and seeing the smiles. Having given her answer, Virginia's eyes went back to the bright red blossoms of the japonica, but they seemed dead enough;—the world was empty, and the sky.

As Madame Croisant climbed the batture into M. Lerot's garden she saw that a buggy was just being driven from his gate. The horse was checked a moment at her approach and Virginia leaned out to say:

"Madame, if you please, you will tell my Grandpa when he comes that I have gone to the priest with François."

"Wit' François—wit' Le Vent? Ah, mais non, mais non. Virginia!" The cry ricochetted from the shack, the voice of it broke with anguish; but François was willing to risk neither the bride nor the green book he had won to any Madame's crying. He whipped up his fast horse and Madame Croisant was left, making her passionate protest to drumming hoof and whirling wheel. And being so left alone Madame wrung her thin hands in wretchedness:

"It shall not be," she cried to the hyacinth; but the hycacinths just foaming into full bloom could only toss their purpling heads for cheer. "It shall not be," she cried to the flowers, but the roses drooped and the jonquils stared.

"When M. Lerot come he will go to priest, he will tell his Virginia is too young to make marry. Ah, if he would only hurry, if he would only hurry!"

M. Lerot was getting old. He no longer walked

briskly, yet as he came stepping proudly with the fine fish he had caught for his baby's dinner, his pace was swift enough, had not Madame been so impatient. For one thing, Monsieur was late. It was nearly twelve by the sun now; he must hurry or his baby would be hungry. For another thing—

"Madame Croisant!" Monsieur lost thought of his lateness, of his duty to go and see M. Davis on the dike. "Madame Croisant! And she t'ink she will come get ma Bébé some more." It was a growl and a snarl; yet when Madame, hastening to meet him, came near enough for speech, Monsieur gave it in courtly form, and he invited:

"You will walk in house? Me, I will tell Virginia who is here."

"Mais non, Monsieur. Me, I t'ank you, mais—mais non, Virginia? She is not here!"

"She is not here? It is, she go to church. She say to me she did not t'ink she would go to church today."

"She did not go to church, Monsieur. Ah, Monsieur. She tell me say to you she has gone to priest wit'—François!"

"Wit' Francois?" Monsieur questioned. He did not understand.

"She has gone to priest wit' him, Monsieur. If we hurry, if we hurry, we can go talk wit' fat'er. We can say to him she is too young. Virginia, ah she should not make marry wit' François!"

"Wit' François?"

"Wit' Le Vent, Monsieur. She has gone wit' Le Vent."

"Wit' Le Vent! Ma Bébé! Gone wit' Le Vent!" Then Monsieur remembered, the blaze went out of his eyes, his shoulder dropped, he turned about like the aged man that he was and sat down on the steps of the shack. And with him was the River, wide and turbid, the loaded boat on the ripple of the eddy and his own voice raised in prayer—pledging all he had in the world to the wind for its aid in this, his hour of vengeance.

"Monsieur," Madame cried, "we must make hurry. François is going quick wit' fast horse. Maybe it is he is going to Bouge Vache, we must hurry, Monsieur. We must hurry."

M. Lerot sat looking down at the string he held. The fine fish on it gasped now and then flirted a dying tail.

"Monsieur," Madame begged. "Do not take it so hard. Virginia did not t'ink. She love you plenty, Monsieur. She love you heap. She is young, she did not t'ink—ah, it was like dis, Monsieur"—and Madame drawing near began trying to tell the wretched truth as she had all pityingly pieced it together:

"Virginia, she did not wish to work"—

M. Lerot raised his head and put his lie aside:

"Virginia did not work, Madame."

"Ah, Monsieur, it was so, I know. It was so, I know."

Their eyes met and there was confession. Between them they had let a life grow up in idleness—what if they had loved it? What if they would have

cherished it? The wind had swept the idle thing away.

Monsieur was the first to move, stretching a hand to lay the string of fish down carefully in the shade of the rosebush:

"'T is nice string of fish I' catch," he said gently, "mais, ma Bébé will not eat fish soup wit' me some more."

"Oh, Monsieur," Madame cried and turned away from the eyes that looked out to her so dry and bright above the thin, wan misery of the old man's lips. "O, Monsieur, we must not let her go wit' Le Vent. We"—

M. Lerot interrupted her, reminding patiently:

"'T is so I have prayed, Madame."

"But, Monsieur, you do not wish for Virginia to make marry wit' François Crovecour. You would be"—

"Crazy" was what Madame was going to say. She did not say it.

Recalling Madame Bigone's contention she stood uncertain, hesitating:

"Was it *only* for the River that M. Lerot was crazy?"

Into the silence came the warning of a bell, droping heavily. It was the plantation gong calling the laborers back to their labor. The protestant planter does not make holiday on Saints' days. It was one o'clock; more than an hour since the fast horse had been driven from the gate. If there had been no objections raised to their marriage, Virginia was

François' wife. But perhaps there had been objections—perhaps the priest himself would refuse because Virginia was so young. Madame Croisant in the tenderness of her heart would have cheered Monsieur with this hope.

"Maybe it is she will come back pretty soon, Monsieur. I will make you some fish soup and some coffee. If she come she will be hungry from her ride."

Monsieur made no answer, save a meaningless mutter about his prayer to the wind. He ate the soup she brought him as a hungry dog might have eaten it, drank deeply of the coffee, but Madame knew that he had no thought of what he did or of what she was saying. His old heart was broken and his brain was numb. She stayed by him through the anxious afternoon, watching over him, waiting; but at the end of it he turned from her, entered his house and shut the door. Face down on his baby's little white bed he pressed his lips into her pillow and the softness that had yielded to her sleepy smile bent beneath the writhing of his meaningless mutter:

" 'T is so I have prayed."

It was too late for Virginia to come now. Madame went down to her waiting boat. Too late, too late, the faint clear light fell over, far down the river the sunset shone; sweetly the breath of the gardens came—faintly blown. Too late, too late. The hyacinths raised their purpling heads, dimly the east gave back the western glow—Madame Croisant bowed beside the water and wept, knowing that she wept in vain.

And indeed Madame would have saved herself this

long anguish of vain waiting had she but remembered it sooner:

Never would a Roman Catholic priest refuse the rite of marriage to a boy and girl awing together on a warm young day in May.

Out on the River, Davis walked the dike he meant to hold, guarding now for fear of cutting rather than from danger of crevasse. No gangs here to whistle and sing, no need of them. Nor any need of sacks. Broad of base, high and strong the big dike raised its walls between False river and the River. Sodded from foot to crown, impervious to sucking and to slough, the sides went down to the murky water and twenty feet below. Walking there in the peace and pleasantness with the day going out in beauty Davis took thought of his first fierce fight with the Mississippi—the old man's daring deed, the wind and rain, the woman's watching face—and then sharply he swung himself about and turned his face to the River and thought of other things. There was no longer a woman's face watching for him. A woman must marry where she finds her mating. Davis gave his thoughts to the River like the civil engineer that he was;—that man should pit his uttermost against her year after year, and his victories so few, at their bravest so ephemeral. And the senseless waste! Why could not that power be controlled and harnessed? That River out there who smiled her yellow smile at man and his petty efforts; who laid low his costly levees, lifted his land and carried it and strewed it upon the sweep of her wantoness, who cut and carved

her own wicked will, mocking at those who would use her for a highway, setting snares for them with eddy and snag and bar. Yet why could she not be bitted and made to work for man? She who swept away the springing crop with her evil smile, why could she not be made instead to grind man's flour and cook his food? To warm and light and comfort him?

"There is enough power going to waste out yonder to drive every boat on the River up-stream—if we could only get at it. To grind every ton of cane, to gin every bale of cotton in Louisiana—if we could only get at it. And some day we shall get at it, Madame Mississippi, and you shall become a slave—slave of the Lamp."

Davis smiled a little at the notion, and to his smiling the River gave back other smiling, cruel, as it were with thin malicious lips. Fifteen feet below the crown on which Davis stood and talked so bravely a crayfish, a little thing no longer than a man's finger had made its hole, very small, yet a hole that bit through the sod and went on and on into the heart of the dike. The River had set those thin lips of her to the mouth of that hole and was sucking softly. No man might know of her sucking, she made no sound, but ever since her first yellow ripple reached the edge of it she had been sucking at the cray-fish hole. All day there had been a trickle creeping through and blending with the blue water of False river. A tiny stream like a two-edged sword it cut up and down as it ran and the weight of the Missis-

sippi was upon the handle of that sword, cutting with it, swift and sure, a path for ruin. A trickle, so ran the story, a trickle and then a torrent of turbid water that rushed in evil glee through all the near reaches of Pointe Coupèe.

"If it had not been for crayfish," said M. Bigone. "If it had not been for crayfish, M. Davee would have saved everyt'ing and every garden in parish."

But when he said that M. Bigone had not yet learned about the fairest garden of them all—how it had been laid waste by the wind before the water reached it.

## CHAPTER V

# Bogue Vache

RARE old parish of Pointe Coupèe with its golden sunshines, its night-black swamps and boding owls; with its bayous of beauty and fields of wealth, quaintly named and quaintly naming! Its Bayou Sara is a town; its "Hermitage" is a steamboat landing; its Island is not an island; its teal duck is a fish. Well might its Bogue Vache be both town and landing, though the English for that be cow bog and the face of it be far from pleasant. Bogue Vache *looked* as though it had traveled a long way over bad roads and fallen down at last, demoralized by the mud of the way, to lie, unclean forever, by the side of the muddy River. The natives said its houses had not been painted since the slaves were freed; strangers said the houses had never been worth painting. Its one street, a muck in wet weather, a dust bed in dry, blundered along between unkempt front yards: — picket fences with pickets missing, sagging gates and slamming shutters. An unlovely, unloved place was Bogue Vache, yet a place of importance. Many people came there to take passage on boats, to buy and to sell. Thrifty people came to put their money in its bank; reckless ones to waste their substance, and angry ones came to sue. Some came to be married, some to be buried, and pious people came to pray.

It was to this Bogue Vache that the Wind came on that fair May Saint's day and brought his bride; and the bride of the Wind so sheltered in her garden life looked about her with wide dark eyes that wondered at what they saw.

"It is a big house you have built for me," Virginia said when François stopped his hot horse before a two-story building that had neither garden nor gate: high, unhappy-looking and crazily put together. The muddy steps of it came down to the mud of the way; bottles and rags of paper lay dirtily about its doors; sounds of loud talking and rattling of dice, smell of stale liquor and smoke came from its unsheltered door. A big, bad, hideous house!

François, mocking, made his Madame understand:

"Build house? Me, build house big like dis? Mon Dieu, it is rich man you t'ink I am? Voilà, it is not in home we shall live; it is in hotel."

"Hotel!" The 'Cajan in Virginia cried in that low voice of horror, spoke in that wide stare of dismay.

François resented both cry and stare:

"Mais oui, hotel. Oui! You cannot live in home if you do not wish to work. To live in home is to sweep floor and scrub floor, to make bed and wash clot'es. To live in hotel is to have nigger woman do work for you. Allons!" He led her into a littered room full of men, smoking and talking, and began to write something in a big book that lay on a desk while he joked with a man who stood behind it. The man looked at Virginia, some of the other

men stopped smoking to laugh; some stopped talking to stare, and she felt her face getting hot, her eyes getting frightened. All her life she had coquetted with the boys of the gardens; but these men with stiff hats on the back of their heads, with bright pins in their ties and bright buttons in their cuffs, — these men who looked at her straight out of their eyes. — Virginia drew back, shrinking, and a man, who had been writing at the desk moved impatiently and put his shoulders between her face and those pitiless eyes. Virginia looked gratefully upon the shoulders that sheltered her, strong and straight and tired under their flannel shirt, looked gratefully also at the pistol butt thrusts into the hip pocket, at the corduroy trousers and muddy boots; before the man lifted his head and said in a sharp, stern way:

"Here! I need some volunteers to man a rescue boat."

François cut short his jesting with the clerk and led Virginia from the room, and as soon as they were alone she demanded:

"Who was that man, François?"

François laughed, leading up the stairs:

"Oh, he is Albert's smart man. He does not let levee break, no. Jamais! But he let little cray-fish make game of him. And now he t'ink he will put me in boat to go pick nigger from roof? Oh, he is smart man, M. Davee is."

"M. Davis!"

François shrugged at the exclamation:

"How you like your room? If you wish for some-t'ing, what it is you must do? Pull rope yonder, c'est tout. Pull rope, and nigger woman will come fetch you what you wish. Supper will be ready pretty soon. I will come for you when bell ring. Kiss me, ma reine."

He caught her to him rudely, carelessly as the wind catches, but Virginia, outraged, flung him indignantly aside.

François laughed merrily, bowing low to her at the door, mocking her angry mood. Having the book he could wait for the bride.

Virginia turned to the window that looked across the street. In the clear late light she saw what there was to see:

A littered yard where yellow children played while a black woman watched from the gallery and a white man smoked in the hammock, having seen this Virginia turned back sharply to the big bare room:

"Oh, what was this place François had brought her to?"

The smell of tobacco and beer came up through the floor, the sound of loud speech and careless profanity rang unceasingly. She heard François' voice. He would be coming for her. Had he meant that she would have to eat supper with all those men.

"I cannot do it. I cannot do it." Then in the midst of her fear she remembered, and took her face from her hands to put her hair bravely in order.

If all those other men were there he would be there too — that tired man in the muddy boots.

But Davis was not at supper. When Virginia shyly reached the table she found the men there talking about him. It seemed he had gone away in a rescue boat to gather in the refugees from roofs and tree-tops.

François thrust in a question:

"He got his volunteer?"

The drummers laughed:

"Don't Davis always get what he's after?"

They began talking together in the detached way men talk of a disaster that does not touch them.

"Texas roads for mine this summer." Virginia heard one say. A man near her assented:

"This will wipe out every plantation on False river — and forty square miles beside. Credit gone rotten in a night."

Some one differed:

"If Davis can close the crevasse"—

He was cried down:

"Close it! You should have gone with us, man, to see it. The water's going through that dike like thunder. The thing will be cut clean out before Davis can make a mattress"—

A lone speaker voiced his faith:

"Davis is a pretty live man."

"Well, he isn't the Lord God Almighty"—

Virginia with white lips was whispering:

"Oh, François. My Grandpa! My Grandpa! He is right on batture."

François was watching a mulatto girl who waited on the table. She was beautiful with the tropic

beauty of blended races: "I know, me, she was not here last time I come," he reflected. And to Virginia he made careless answer:

"Your Grandpa is all right. M. Davee will take care of him."

"You think so?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh, mais oui, sure," François said, trying to say it as he had heard the drummers say it.

Virginia could not feel sure. That night she kept her first watch with anxiety and as she sat by the window she heard a voice saying:

"And old man Pierre Lerot?"

Was she sleeping, dreaming? Behind her through the silence came the sound of François' heavy breathing, before her was the River wide and wicked under a waning moon.

"And Pierre Lerot! What about Pierre Lerot!"

No need to look down into the street. Virginia had recognized the voice in its quick impatience of utterance. Before Davis, a darkey stood hat in hand and scratched his kinky head:

"Fo', God, Boss. I swear I done look for him everywhar"—

"Was his house under when you got there?"

"Jest could see little pint, Boss. He live right on batture and didn't have not'ing but shack. I reckon hit kinder kerlapse when water come rushing 'long dar and him sleep in his baid"—

"Oh, shut up! A man that can cross the Mississippi in a loaded skiff when she's high — the way he

did out there at Le Gras — isn't going to be drowned in his bed."

"Yessir, dat's true, Boss. I swear fo' God dat's mighty true. But hit's nigh on ten years since he cross Ribber."

"You go again tomorrow and look for him. If you find him, bring him to me. Look everywhere."

"Yessir, Boss. All right sir, Boss. Hit's like you say. I gwine go look for dat old man tomorrow. Gwine go look everywhar in Pint Coupée"—

They went into the hotel, the wide-awake white man, the sleepy darkey, leaving Virginia to face the remorse that peered at her, pallid and relentless as the River.

"I will speak to Mr. Davis tomorrow. I will ask him." And though the thought frightened her she clung to it. François? Even if François should go and come again she could not trust the news he brought. If it were true. "But I will ask Mr. Davis." Before all those men, in the presence of that yellow girl, with François laughing and joking, in all the startling, stunning surroundings of that horrible t'able d'hôte she would speak to this stern, muddy man and ask for news of the Grandfather she had forgotten in that hot hour of her mortification.

Davis came in one door as Virginia came in the other and head up, white, and very sweet to look upon she crossed to him and said:

"You have had news of my Grandpa?"

"Your grandfather?" The civil engineer stood at courteous pause — in his heart an aching impatience. Would they never be done asking him for news — of mother, wife, child? In his eyes there was only deference and the desire to understand.

"My grandfather," Virginia said, "is M. Pierre Lerot."

"Pierre Lerot," repeated the tired man. "Pierre Lerot." He glanced at the entering groups. "I should be able to give you news shortly after breakfast," he said. "I will let you know."

After breakfast Davis knocked at Virginia's door:

"If you will step into the hall a moment, please?"

"You have news of my Grandfather?"

"About sundown last evening, shortly before the water from the crevasse came, Madame Croisant saw him go into his house and shut the door. He has not been seen since. I had a man out last night — I have been out myself since daybreak"— He put his hand out, offering dumb sympathy to the anguish in her eyes.

"He was a brave man," he said, "The bravest I ever knew."

Virginia drew her hand from his to cover her breaking face.

"Was," she sobbed, "Was"—

"No — no. I shall send another man out today — I am sorry"—

Davis shut the door softly upon her sobbing, the ache in his heart throbbed up to ache in his throat;

and going down stairs clumsily in his clodded boots, beaten and bruised, he swore under his breath, saying:

"Damn the Mississippi river!"

## CHAPTER VI

# The Wind and His Bride

VIRGINIA was not ignorant. She had studied hard at school, had been, too, the companion and friend of a teacher with rich store of books to lend. Yet at her window in Bogue Vache she saw and heard many things that her studies had not prepared her to understand and found herself conning subjects that her absorbed readings in the sweet shade of the shack had not caused her to consider at all. That unkempt yard across the street!

In the numb weariness that days of remorse and sorrow left to her, Virginia watched and wondered. Not that a red-headed darkey was unheard of. Virginia had heard of them since childhood. In the gardens—even in the sweetest of them, Mesdames and Messieurs, and even young boys and girls sometimes, spoke of the chaud-tête. But they spoke of it always as of an evil thing. Spoke of it indeed as of a thing of shame—done in danger of the law. And here in Bogue Vache, openly, in the light of such sunshine as shone there, the red-haired negroes played in the white man's yard, the black woman rocked at ease on his gallery, and the law did—nothing? Perhaps there was no law in this dirty landing?

Virginia brooded, lonely and sick at heart until even François in his carelessness noticed her steady guard at the window:

"For why you watch little chaud-tête so much? You t'ink he is pretty, yes?"

Virginia lifted eyes where indignation strove to flash a faint reflection of last year's ready blaze:

"I should think that white man would be afraid?"

"Afraid?" François uttered. And he asked as though suddenly interested:

"For why he should be afraid?"

"Why—afraid he would be sent to jail. It is so my Grandfather told me. It is against the law of Louisiana for a white man to marry"—

"Oh—marry," François said and laughed. "But yes! It is against law for him to marry. Mais, tête-bleu, Virginia, M. Croix yonder is smartest lawyer in Bogue Vache. You t'ink he would be such fool as to marry? He say black woman is housekeeper for him. Tout le monde know yellow children is his children. But you t'ink anybody in Bogue Vache care for what color a man's child is? Mais non. He can have red child, blue child, green child if he wish. It is for him to say. But, me," and for a moment François' bright eyes grew wistful, "I should wish to have some children. Man is not man if he has not child."

Virginia looked away from him in swift, sickening distaste. Children? Little red-headed, fiery eyed, heedless, heartless! Virginia's face grew cold. She and François had not been married very long, but already she knew that one Wind was enough for all the world.

"Children are a great deal of trouble," she said coldly.

François drew nearer:

"I would pay nigger woman to keep care"—

Virginia interrupted, her tone cold and dreary:

"And who would take care of the colored woman? The teacher talked to me about that once. She said her sister had a colored nurse and that she found it more trouble to take care of the nurse than it would have been to take care of the children."

François left her, but was back again within the hour bringing a rose in his hand:

"Voici, ma reine. You do not wish to be mamma, you wish to be queen? And, me, I shall keep my swear. You shall be queen. You shall wear rose in hair. Voilà, rose! Put on pretty dress for dinner. If you wish for anyt'ing, pull rope and nigger woman will fetch it you. 'T is plenty t'ing I can pay nigger woman to do." And he went out laughing as the wind laughs.

Virginia looked at the closed door, but did not consider at all François' parting words. Had he really thought for one moment that she would be willing to be a mother to such children as his children would be? And as she repelled the thought of those wild-eyed, wanton ones there came crowding thoughts of other children, gentle, broad-shouldered boys, who climbed about her chair with laughter good to hear; also, thoughts of little girls busy in dear, little womanly ways, with lips that arched tenderly; and they too laughed as the boys did, lifting up their heads and laughing straight out from the heart, laughing all of them just as Albert used to laugh when he

and she were little and played together in the garden.

"I wonder if he and Mathilde are married yet?" Virginia moved restlessly and looked down at the rose she held, a bud opening its creamy heart. François with his fine French taste for beauty made no mistakes in the dressing of his queen. Though she might wear only mourning shades her blacks were of the softest, her white, the purest. He delighted to take Virginia on his arm and lead her down into the dingy dining-room to be the one bright forbidden star of it; to put her in a buggy behind his fast horse and drive through the street of Bogue Vache and down the levee to the dike where work had been begun. In all Pointe Coupée there was not a woman more beautiful, not a girl more sweetly pure than his queen.

Virginia shrank from the showing off, dreaded the dinners; but as she looked at the rose now and remembered his words she felt sharp self-reproach:

"If he is going to keep his word with me I should be willing to keep my word with him. And be a—queen." The word mocked her, making heartless mirth at her sorry state, but she put the mocking aside and began to dress. She must keep her word.

"And he has been so kind as he knows how to be." She was thinking of the morning when he had come upon her in her grief. He had done all he knew how to do and had brought the priest to comfort her. And when she had wanted to draw money for the mass to be said for her grandfather's soul, François had gone with her to the bank, drawn out the money for her, known just how everything must be done.

## CHAPTER VII

# The Boss

THE dreariness of overflow; the dullness of bankrupt business; the smell of the Landing; mud; and always the River. So Virginia at her window watched the weeks go by. Sometimes there came up to her the sound of heavy boots that tramped impatiently; sometimes the sound of a voice, resolute above the cloutish clamor of the bar came up to her in clean-cut, emphatic utterance, in courteous speech, in the dry terse terms of pay-roll or planking. Davis, the Boss, was building a new dike where the old one had been cut away and as she heard his coming and going, Virginia began to understand his position among men: that it was somewhat inflexible. Standing generally in muddy boots, always under loaded shoulders, the Boss stood sternly for humanity and for high endeavor. Men, she gathered from the echo that she heard, men, even strangers, deferred to him, to the resolution in his eyes, to the purpose in his speech. So by sound and the echo of sound Virginia came to know the Boss; but when she went into the dining room for dinner one Sunday and saw a solidly set-up man in well cut clothes standing at a window with his back to the room she did not know who it was until François led her across with a word of introduction. When the well-dressed gentleman turned with a quick-short bow and said, "Mrs. Crevecour" in the speech of her

father and with level r's, she recognized the man who had moved to put his shoulders between her and those staring eyes—who, later, had tried to help her while she sobbed in the dimness of that hall upstairs.

"Mr. Davis," she said, and put out her hand to him with quick pleasure.

Davis took the small hand awkwardly enough. He was not a ladies' man. And what could he say to her with the memory of their last meeting between them, and the eyes of the crowd looking on?

Virginia's French wit with its readiness covered his want of ease. As soon as François had seated her beside the civil engineer she turned and said casually:

"I have read a book about Mr. Jefferson Davis. Are you related to him?"

Awkwardness dropped from the Boss:

"Davis," he repeated, "You have read a book about Jeff Davis?" And being only a blundering American without any French finesse at all, he let his astonishment show through.

Virginia explained:

"My teacher gave me the book. She was from Mississippi. She was proud of him."

"She should have been," the engineer told her, and his tone was the tone of a Mississippian who speaks of Jeff Davis.

Virginia understood, it seemed easy to understand this strong man:

"You are from Mississippi? And my father, he was from Mississippi also!"

"He was? And his name?"

"Cleve—Thomas Cleve."

"Cleve?" Davis repeated thoughtfully. "Cleve"—He leaned a little toward her, his voice lowered:

"They called him Tomas Clave around here?"

"It is the French," Virginia explained.

"I understand," he said, and for a moment he said no more, recalling the story as he had heard it. A young fellow, little more than a boy, teaching to pay his way through a law school—and falling in love with the prettiest girl in his school and marrying her. Made a mixed marriage," the engineer reflected impatiently. But the Mississippian had stood by his guns. He had cherished the girl whose tender beauty had turned his head—had not dragged her away to be a stranger in his homeland, but had cherished her among her kind until malaria had claimed him. Davis put aside the gumbo he did not like and emphasized his distaste by laying his forearm on the table where the plate had been placed and leaning slightly forward.

Virginia smiled impulsively at the action, reminding her as it did of the wilfullness of a spoiled child who was not going to eat what it did not want to eat, no matter who said it was good. It seemed funny in this stern man, funny and a little lovable.

Davis, scarcely conscious of his action, followed out the line of thought to its conclusion and asked:

"And your mother? She is living?"

"Mamma was caught by water hyacinths and drowned"—

"Recently?"

"Oh, no. I was only five or six years old at the time."

Fatherless, motherless, married to a wild young gambler, exposed in her girlish beauty to the malice of this wretched landing! Davis sat silent until, toward the end of dinner, Virginia arose, asking:

"You have read the book—about Jefferson Davis?"

"No; I don't know that I have. What is it? His life?"

"All about him, from the time he was a little school boy and got between his sister and the big deer—until he died."

"I should like to read it."

"I would be glad to lend it to you. I have it in my room."

"It would be a godsend to me this afternoon. There is nothing to read here—not even a newspaper. And a man can't work on Sunday in a Catholic community—unless he has been to mass."

Virginia smiled:

"I will run upstairs and get it for you now." What was it in her that made her respond so instinctively to that tone of impatience, those words of dry disgust? The blood of her father? Virginia did not question what or why. She came back to Davis as to one of her own kind, feeling happy to come. And yet when he was standing before her with the opened book in his hand, he asked out of the leaves he was absently turning:

"And your grandfather?"

She answered him with the sure serenity of her Roman Catholic faith:

"The masses have been said for his soul."

Left alone, and in order that he might remain alone, Davis carried the book to a bench under the pecan tree and sat considering its printed pages, and seeing some pictures there.—A sorry little farm clinging to a caving bank—his recent survey had thrown this farm outside the levee. It was a tidy little place now, leased to a thrifty 'Cajan; but when the old levee failed its condition would be even more sorrowful than it had been when Tomas Cleve was trying to farm it:

"Poor devil!" And yet Tomas Cleve had married the woman he loved. He had lived man's one deep hour.

Davis turned a page.

And there was a picture of an old man in a loaded boat. Pitting the strength of his bent old back gallantly against the spin of the eddy.

"Brave fellows that these old Frenchmen are! I would like to know that his body had been decently buried—even if the masses have been said for his soul."

And by the softening light Davis saw yet another picture on the printed page. Young and pure and very wistful in its tender beauty. And seeing that picture there Davis shut the book and went to walk on the levee.

He had not particularly noticed Virginia that first day in the hotel office. In his hurry and crowding

cares he had set his shoulders to shield her as unthinkingly as he would have lifted a child from danger of a wheel. And when she came to him asking for news he had seen only the anxiety in her eyes. But now he had seen her—

"Here—the wife of that gambler!"

He had no fine fling of French chivalry in his being, was only a Mississippian, brave enough, perhaps, but blunt of speech. His business in life was to build levees and to keep them from breaking after they were built. He raised his hat to women and gave up his seat to them in public places, but he had ceased to idealize them after the girl he was engaged to had, to put it plainly, thrown him over for a richer man. Hurt and unhappy he had promised himself then that he would never again throw his cloak into the mud for any woman to walk upon. But this woman was so young, so pathetic in her purity. Was there nothing he could put between her and the mud of this evil place?

Davis had not read poetry since they made him do it at school, but he felt the need of poetry now out there on the levee with the River going by and the stars shining down—and that gentleness gathering through all his being as the mist was gathering on the water.

## CHAPTER VIII

# The Soul in Purgatory

"Ah, my God! It is cold, it will be tonight!"

The masses had indeed been said for M. Lerot's soul, but M. Lerot was not yet out of purgatory because M. Lerot was not yet dead.

"Ah, my God! It is cold, it will be tonight." Wrecked in mind and worn in body, the old man sat over his fire and fed it, muttering about the freezing night. But he had no thought of cold nor any concern for it. Shivering as a dog shivers, feeling only with the faculties of a dumb beast M. Lerot was spared the anguish of human perceptions and the multiplied agonies of a man's imagination. His camp fire's glow and gleam fell upon the palmetto hut that stood him in stead for shelter, struck up against the swamp, black beyond the bayou. M. Lerot sat, dozed and muttered.

It had been many months since that Saint's Day in May, but Monsieur did not care for that. The River had come upon him as he lay face down on the little white bed and with the smell of her mud had brought him the madness that she always brought. Monsieur had staggered up ready as ever to give back blow for blow to the enemy that had ruined him. He had found his pirogue and prepared his paddle for the fight. But the sweep of the water had been too swift

for Monsieur, spent with heart-ache as he was, and the River wrought her wicked will with him at last. Had lifted him and carried him as she had borne all her other waste and wreckage back to the swamp. And though he cursed and struggled she had left him there to pay with a death of slow starvation for the sacks that had checked her course.

But old though he was, beaten and broken, Monsieur had a heart in him that had learned to hate and while his hate lived, Monsieur would live, mad maybe, only a muttering old man, yet living to thwart the River once more in her maliciousness:

"You t'ink you have fetched me so far I cannot come back to beat you some more, ha?" he said to the receding water. "But, me, I will come. And I will slap paddle in your face"—

So he wandered in the swamp, muttering ceaselessly, seeking always the deeper stream through the wasting water; living on the black berries that hung from the high bushes where the rank vines had clustered them; living on the birds' eggs he found in drooping branch or stunted tree; living day by day just to find his way back and so slap his paddle into the face of the River once more. Canebrakes closed him in, shallow places barred his way, turned aside, checked and hindered, but always dumbly persisting, M. Lerot fared on. A bird caught from its roosting, a fish marooned in a puddle, following always the drift toward deeper water, going down to the bayou as an alligator goes, making no wrong turns, deluded by no vain hopes for a shorter cut, Monsieur

and his brave old pirogue went on day by day through the gloom of it, night by night under the blackness of it, with the boding owl for cheer. And sometimes he sniffed the breeze and sometimes he smelled the water, but he never looked up to the sun nor strove to steer by the stars.—In that dense tangle of vine and leaf there was neither sun nor stars. So he worked his way, paddling or resting at the paddle, muttering and sleeping, with no thought of the garden he had made, no memory of his baby, nor of the man that he had been. Only madness that did not know it was mad and the purpose that his hate had planned.

But after Monsieur came down into the bayou even his purpose seemed to have wandered. He pulled the pirogue up on the bank, stretched himself in the sun and slept. For days and days he lingered there in the warm June weather, sleeping, resting, feasting upon the fish he caught. And when at last he would have gone on down the bayou the old pirogue had settled into the soft mud of the bank and he could not push it down into the water that waited limpid and brown to bear him on his way.

"When rain come bayou will rise some and you will float," Monsieur said talking to his boat as he had talked to it in the long years that they had gone together over the fair face of False river. "When rain comes." So he waited for the September rains, making meanwhile a hut of palmetto leaves, weaving the roof, shaping the sides, making it weather proof according to his skill. Wild plums ripened, persimmons began to turn, but the rains to raise the bayou

did not come. Monsieur gathered moss from the trees where it hung in lengths as long and broad as a man, gray and soft. He lined his hut with it, he made a bed knee deep and warm. The pig nuts and pecans fell from frosted burrs and still no rain, or, not rain enough to float the old boat sinking deeper daily in the mud. The winter came with bear meat, and camp fires, and the bitter night that made Monsieur remember:

"Ah, my God, it is cold it will be tonight," he had said, and then he said slowly:

"Ah, my God, it is cold winter up yonder. Ohio will stay froze all winter. It is not January rise we shall have. But in May—Ha, you t'ink you will come sneak on me some more while I am sleeping? But, me, I will watch out for you, I know, me what it is you going do in May." And he rose there in the blackness of the swamp beyond the bayou and shook his fist at the River where she taunted him miles away. And he defied her and damned her—for by now Monsieur's madness was well-fed and fierce.

"When March come," he cried, cursing in his helplessness, "When March come plenty rain will come. Bayou will rise, and, me, I will be ready to fight you some more."

A dry summer and drier fall with the water only five feet deep in False river; a dry cold winter with ice-locked upper streams.—It was not Monsieur alone who saw the signs and read them. Davis saw and read them, too.

## CHAPTER IX

# The Little Chaud-Tete

With wandering in the swamps and waiting at the windows the months were accomplished and the May day came again.

Virginia had become an object of common observation to the hotel people, even as her clothes had become an object of common envy—even as she had become a theme of perpetual recurrence in the thoughts of Davis, the civil engineer.

Once a month, for nearly a year, Davis had gone into Bogue Vache to draw funds to meet his payroll, and each day that he had dined there François had seated Virginia at his side.

"That she should be *his* wife!"

But the Boss was not walking the levee for the purpose of thinking about another man's wife—but rather to guard it against the mischief another man might do. For the River was high and the people on the side opposite him were threatened with a crevasse. A break on this side would relieve them, and if a levee will not break of its own accord a few blows from pick or spade dealt deeply in the dark may make it break of man's accord. A dangerous deed and done at the risk of a rifle ball, certainly, yet not a deed too dangerous for a desperate man. Davis knew this, knew, too, that when a man comes to cut a levee he

does not come unarmed. Last year he had himself been a member of the coroner's jury that sat upon the body of a man found dead on the levee that man had volunteered to guard. The finding had been that the deceased had been killed by a blow from some blunt weapon struck from behind; the verdict had been, as usual, "Death by violence." Davis knowing all this well enough walked guarding the old levee he meant to hold until the new levee he had built behind it should be sodded on the water side; and when he came to the water-mark he opened the lantern under his coat and read the stage; for Davis, the civil engineer, was a Mississippian and therefore not a cautious man.

"21.4," he closed the slide and clipped his brows together. The levee would stand 25. There was three and six-tenths between the River and her little farm. Davis went back slowly, alertly along the way he had come, watching the darkness for a shadow on it, guarding the silence for a sound. "21.4."

Yesterday the stage had stood at 20., the day before at 19.9.

"The crest of the rise reached Vicksburg last night."

Seven more days to rise and the River rising at the rate of 1.1 a day with only three and six-tenths to show and the sod scarcely started on the new levee beyond. High water two years in succession: that was what the levee Board had not counted on. It had been slow with appropriation—slow with supplies—boiling the Boss in his own impatience.

"And now, unless there is a crevasse above us," Davis thought, and added—

"So young, and in that place!"

He had from Bogue Vache the unreasoning recoil that some women have from snakes; and for the chaud-tête all of an Anglo-Saxon's deep-seated disgust.

"And she cannot look out of her window without looking into that dirty beast's yard. I wonder if she knows—but of course she does, she is not a fool." He eased the weight of the rifle barrel in the hollow of his arm and took thought of the stage:

"21.4. But if there should be a crevasse at Logan"—

The levee at Logan was rotten, Davis knew it. He had reported its condition months ago and been swearing ever since at the inaction of the Board. But if there should be a crevasse there now? It would mean back water for Bogue Vache, but it would save the tiny farm nestled between the old levee and the new. How little and lone and left-out it had looked last evening all by itself down there in the waning light. Behind him he felt the River going by, soundless and soulless, and knew she was smiling her thin-lipped yellow smile, and he recalled the books and magazines he and Virginia had exchanged, and their brief bits of talking—how clever her criticisms had been.

"And so young—barely sixteen—if that."

Tomorrow he would be riding into Bogue Vache again for funds to meet some small camp-expenses. He would see—

Davis frowned:

"No; I don't know—I don't know that I shall take dinner there tomorrow."

He flashed his light to read the stage again, looked out over the River; looked down at the farm; and then swore at the weight of the rifle on his arm; at the weight of the stick in his boot-leg; at the mud and misery of it all.

Virginia was not a fool. A year of life as it was lived in Bogue Vache could teach many lessons and Virginia, unhappily, had brains enough to learn. And when the lessons were learned one by one she began to spell with them—sitting alone in her big empty room, began to spell with them as a child might spell with blocks, and the word they spelled was "Caution." Caution that she say nothing; that she do nothing; that she trust François as she might trust the wind, indeed, but not otherwise.

Of the many women who stopped at the hotel to wait for a boat there were not a few who would have been worthy of Virginia's confidence; women who wondered at her position, but believed in her purity: who would have been glad to give sympathy had Virginia but asked it.

"The little Madame François," they learned, "was proud." Madame François, the servants told them, never left her room, save on Monsieur's arm. All day long she stayed there, sewing sometimes, making the pretty dresses she wore so prettily, reading sometimes in papers, sometimes in books. Reading one book many times. Not the Bible, no! It was a book

with a blue back that she read in every day. "Oh, mais non. Madame François had no children."

To the women who had homes; to the women who traveled; to the lady in the parlor, and to the cook in the kitchen such a life seemed unendurable. What it seemed to her Virginia did not say—not even to herself. She was a 'Cajan and as a 'Cajan endured patiently the hardships she suffered; she was an American and as an American she would be strong in the rights she reserved. Her nature was the result of two forces—two opposing forces. Virginia did not know—did not try to know. Only to live her life out day by day—keeping her word to be a queen, while the word made mock of her dreary state. Only to live her life out, enduring the drab dirtiness of the street; the children that played in the yard, the never-ending "come seven, come 'leven" of the crap-shooter, the smell of the liquor that rose from the bar; and the smell of the mud that came up from the River; enduring it all, absence of tenderness and emptiness of days. It was her life—the life of clean hands that she had demanded. She endured it even as she endured the memories of the garden her folly had laid waste, the thought of the fond old heart her heedlessness had broken:

"Madame Croisant had seen him go into his house and shut the door"—After she had told him, ah, yes! After she had told him. He had never been seen since.

"Would he have forgiven me if he had lived?

Would he have let me love him—ah, if I had only loved him—then.''

So from week end on to week end until pay-day came and Davis sat beside her at dinner and talked to her in the short level r's of her father's tongue. Talked not of her or himself—she knew nothing at all about him, what work he was doing, where he came from or whither he went. Their talking was of the remote high places, dreams of a daring mind, and always her mind met his in a companionship of comprehension that was waking and wide and warm.

And on this merky May Saint's Day, with the River high against the levee, with the horror of overflow or the dread of back-water heavy upon even the hopeless, Virginia came to the opening that gave upon her one clean comfortable spot in life and closed the door of it with an uneasiness she could not understand. Saying:

''Today is pay-day and he will be at dinner again. But I will not go down to dinner again.''

She had just finished dressing for dinner when that uneasiness came to close the door. Instead of the usual white bud, François had brought a crimson japonica for her hair. In the glass before her Virginia saw its effect—the flower in her hair repeated the color in her lips and between them her eyes looked out from under their lashes, larger, darker, deeper and brighter than she had ever seen them before. Had François known how it would be?

''No,'' Virginia whispered, ''I cannot go down to dinner today.''

"Ma reine! Charmant!"

François had flung open the door and was standing in the doorway, his eyes and manner alike joyous with pride.

"Charmant! M. Davee will forget his high water when he is sit by you today."

Virginia steadied her tone, fearing lest it betray that she was bothered and unhappy:

"Mr. Davis will not sit by me today," she said.

François' eyes so very bright in their fire-bitten brown ran past her, laughing. He seemed to be seeing something that made him prouder than the beauty of his queen had ever made him:

"Mais oui, he will sit by you. Me, I could not stay for dinner today, 't is man I must go see"—François' eyes grew prouder in their laughing—"young man I must go see. So I say to M. Davee, 'Will you see ma Madame t'rough dinner?' And he say to me, but yes, it is proud he will be to take care of you."

"That was all he could say," Virginia commented coldly. Then she said firmly:

"I will not go down to dinner today," and saying this she put up her hand and took the wonder-working flower from her hair.

"Quoi," François uttered. His eyes left off their laughing and went to the window furtive, uneasy. Had she heard what he had just heard:

"Tête-blue, I was fool to do t'ing so close!" Aloud he repeated in dismay:

"You do not wish to go down?"

"I will not go down."

François looked at her and relieved, looked away:

"Non, she has not hear. An if she does not go down, if she stay in her room till tomorrow—

"C'est bien, ma reine! If you do not wish to go down, you do not go down. I will have nigger woman—Mais, non, it is me will fetch you dinner on plate. What it is I shall fetch? Some soup, some fish, some beefsteak?"—he rattled out of the room with his ridiculous bill of fare, leaving Virginia to the solitude her will had wrought. Absently, wearily, with no thought now of its beauty, she took up the flower and thrust it again into her hair.

To Davis, François made his excuses:

"Eh bien, Monsieur, Madame will not come down to dinner today. 'T is so she say—she will not leave her room, not at all, she will not. Me, I do not know for why she will not leave her room. Mais it is so she say. Like woman say, it is so she will do. But for why she say—God knows!" François shrugged and remembered his manners:

"I t'ank you, Monsieur."

"Not at all," Davis said, and sat down to dine alone. Logan had broken, there would be back-water in Bogue Vache by midnight, the panic had emptied the hotel, the last boat had gone down loaded. Davis, knowing these things had thought to dine alone save for one delicious little presence. Now he was disappointed and annoyed with himself that he should be disappointed.

François had asked him, in case he stayed for

supper, to take Virginia out for a little walk on the levee after the sun went down:

"She would go wit' you, Monsieur. She would not by herself or wit' anybody else. And it is all day she has been shut in her room."

Davis had agreed and afterward he had thought of it.

Out there in the dewy stillness, just they two alone together under the stars. The sharpness of his disappointment made him suspicious:

"What is that red-headed fool trying to do?" and he remembered a criticism he had read:

"Trust a Frenchman to know what a man's blood will do when it is up and warm." This gambler, unclean and without honor, had thought to play upon his honor for some unholy purpose.

What was that purpose?

Davis laid his right hand on the cloth before him and looked at it, strong, well-made and masculine. Davis looking at this saw a girl's face appealing in its purity, and as he sat there through the dinner hour with drawn brows and locked jaws he was thinking neither of building levees nor breaking levees, neither of the need of haste nor of high water. When the waiter came to clear the table Davis put three questions to him and though this waiter was a Frenchman with obsequious "Monsieur" forever on his lips, he answered those questions straightly as a man must who gave information to the Boss. What he knew of François; of the luscious mulatto girl, of the little chaud-tête that had come today—

all the kitchen talk the waiter told. And when the man had made an end of his telling, Davis nodded, gave him a quarter and went out to look at the stage and the River. Not forgetting at all the rotten old levee he had elected to guard, yet thinking deeply of this other charge that had come into his keeping: tossed there by the Wind, or given by God? Davis did not question how. He was a man of deeds, not questionings. As he strode along in his muddy boots he said to himself:

"The crevasse at Logan has made things safe enough until tonight.—I must manage to see her somehow before I go."

He should have been in camp, the boots kicked from his aching feet, his collar open, his tired body sunk in sleep, but Davis had no thought now for the cot that waited or for the watching and waking that had worn even his stubborn strength down to weariness. Walking, and thinking carefully as he walked, he had come to a warehouse outside the levee. It was up to its eaves now in water and its roof was as a little island in a murky sea. François and a negro roustabout were stretched upon this roof and between them Davis saw some money. The money, it seemed, was not enough. François gestured grandly, indignantly, persuasively, but the roustabout kept shaking his kinky head. Then, eagerly, and as though he had just thought of it, François rose to his elbow, swept the money into his pocket, and the words "Cheval vite" rang out so sharply that they reached Davis across the silent water. The roustabout responded

with an instant change of attitude, listened, took orders, and soon slid from the roof, going back to Bogue Vache in the skiff that had brought him.

François rolled over and lay face down on the boards. His fast horse was gone:

"But me, I am going have my little chap safe wit' me tonight." Only a little chaud-tête, perhaps, but then it was his very own, his first very own.

"And it is good part I shall do by him. I shall take him to France where chaud-tête is fine as white child is. I shall make money for him, plenty money." And François, lying out there in the midst of a murky sea under a low-bending murky sky, saw just how all this money would be made:

"Run River," he said.

Bogue Vache had been dull for a year; now, with its back water, it would be dead for months to come. But out on the River, where the stately packets went up and down, where wealthy men traveled and bored men set in for a little game of poker—up in the Texas where plantations often changed hands in a night, there would be rich pickings for a sharp gambler to garner in. François saw just how it would be.

And Davis, reading all the signs, understood too just how it would be, and burned in the rush of rage the vision brought: yet in his anger felt troubled and torn so that his hand shook when he settled his hat.

## CHAPTER X

# The Little Green Book

"I WONDER if he is going to stay to supper," Virginia drew back from her window, surprised to see Davis returning to the hotel.

And if he should stay to supper, would she go down? The questions came in quick sequence. What had François told him? That she had refused his care?

"And he has been so kind to me, I would not want him to think I was proud with him."

And, indeed, the gentle little Madame all in her loneliness, scared by fears she could not fathom, had not meant to be proud. Why had she refused to be placed in charge of the only man she trusted? Because François wished to place her there? She could not say. Brought up in the gardens of Pointe Coupèe, sheltered, safe-guarded, what was this unknown thing she had shrunk from, shrinking through all the woman's soul of her?

"But I can never go back to my garden again." And thinking of her garden, bending with beauty, yearning with sweetness, Virginia moved to watch the street. Would Davis cross it or pass on to the bank? It startled her to see what a busy street it was. So many people hurrying there, with the dread of the back-water and the wish to escape. Troubled men and worried women with just time to catch a

boat, or draw some money, or buy provisions or, perhaps, say a prayer. People in carriages, on foot and in saddle, and there in the thick of the stream a little creole pony hitched to a 'Cajan cart. Virginia leaned to look. Let them hurry as they would, the pony took his time, trotting slowly.—They say a Creole pony may trot all day in the shade of a single tree. Virginia had time to see the baby that lifted a wobbly little head to crow at the sights of the crowd and to see the brown, brave faces of father and mother that bent toward the baby, delighted of lip, and proud and happy in their eyes:

"Albert. Ah, I did not know he had a little child."

The baby toppled with its own over-joyous effort, the mother cuddled it close for comforting, and the father lifted his head and laughed tenderly, proudly, straight out from his heart.

"Ah," Virginia said softly. She turned about to her chair and sat down. The garden she had wasted came gathering about her in its fragrance, wide-eyed jonquil, orange and rose—the scent of the sweet-olive strained her heart. The garden she had wasted! And of the garden that might have been hers—the wifely duty, the mother love?

"But I," she said in utter self-condemnation, "I wished to keep my hands clean." She charged her folly as fully as she should and left it to stand so written through her years:

"Yes! I called François Le Vent; but it is I who am the wind. A wind in my own garden and in my Grandpa's garden. I have been even as a wind in

François' life. Whatever there was to waste, I have wasted.'' Her French blood rose in its eagerness, wrung her with its reckless remorse, pierced her with its poignancy and its passion. But later, when the long hours of after dinner had passed; when the boat had blown its three, deep-throated notes at the landing; when the hurrying crowds had made an end of their hurrying, later when the hotel steward came knocking at her door with a bill that had been running for a month or more that same French blood lifted Virginia's head and gave her the gracious courage of her kind:

''Thank you, Monsieur. I see the bank is still open. I will take my little green book and go at once to get your money for you.''

And a little later still, when a jaded cashier had pointed a penholder and said patiently:

''Please notice the entry, Madame. Monsieur François drew out your deposit nearly a year ago,'' the gallant blood rose yet again, gave her ready speech and courteous, clothed her with gentle dignity, bore her with unbroken bearing from the bank and then—left her tired and troubled, alone in the street that was a muck in wet weather, a dust bed in dry—that would by night be awash in a dirty tide.

## CHAPTER XI

# The Flower in Her Hair

VIRGINIA, deserted by her courage, forlorn and all alone turned her face away. She had no money to pay the hotel bill, then she could not go back to the hotel. The flower in her hair, stirred by her nervous walking, nestled deeper, her breathing caught and broke. She might not go back to the hotel, then where might she go? A dull gray steeple, white of cross and peaceful rose up in answer. Where may a Roman Catholic always go when her heart is heavy and her courage fails? Into the church whose door is never locked; to the shrine of the merciful Mother whose ear is never too far away. Virginia knelt. The silence that brooded about her was cool and dim and peaceful even as the silence of her garden had been. She began to pray, feeling safe and sheltered before the Virgin's shrine.

But for Davis, and he knew it, the stark sunshine of the street and the staring crowds had been a safer shield. Nervous, and not sure of himself, he bent over that kneeling figure:

"Tell me, tell me at once. Have you any friends—and relatives that you can go to?"

Virginia rose and stood beside him, the flower in her hair worked its wonder in her eyes:

"My Grandfather is dead," she reminded gently.

Davis checked and turned his eyes away.

"I know," he said. He looked at the altar and after a moment put his hat down that he might thrust his hands into his pocket. And so guarded he turned back stubbornly to look upon the beauty that had never been so beautiful before—so strangely moving:

"You can't stay here. Don't. Your"—But he could not say that word. Not here in the dimness and the nearness with all the world shut out. He stopped and turned the words around:

"François is gone—he is not coming back. I want to send you away from here. I want to know that you will be sheltered and cared for before I leave to-night"—

"Thank you, Mr. Davis, but François"—

"He's gone. He's not coming back. He—he did not go alone."

"He did not?" But just as she questioned it Virginia saw François' eyes, laughing just as Albert's had laughed when he looked upon his little son.

"No," Davis said, "That colored girl"—She was too young for such stuff as this.

Virginia said softly:

"The baby must have been a boy"—

"You knew!"

"No, I did not know. I did not think until you said"—

"Well! Let it go! What I want to do, now, is to get you away from here. I want to put you on a boat and send you to a convent in New Orleans. You can stay there until you get your divorce and then"—

"Divorce." Virginia drew back gently. "I cannot get a divorce, Mr. Davis. I am a Catholic."

In all the thinking Davis had done in the last long hour, he had not thought of this, and now he would not think of it. He put it impatiently aside:

"Never mind the religious part of it." He shut his hands hard in his pockets and plunged into practical details. "Here, we must hurry up and put this thing through. Some one might come in—it would be best for you not to be seen talking to me. A sister will meet you in New Orleans—she is all right. She is an angel, she nursed me once when I was sick."

"When you were sick?" Virginia's eyes showed surprise and after that—concern.

Davis said sharply:

"Don't!" But his hands came out of his pockets and caught up hers both together between his own:

"Promise me! Promise me that when The City of the South lands tonight you will go on board. You will be all right. That sister will meet you. You need not see me until it is all over. There is a nice old lawyer I know. I'll send him to you. He'll make it as easy for you—Yes? What is it?"

Virginia, having interrupted him with that sound of pained protest was yet unable to say to him clearly what it was. She had been as wind in her grandfather's garden, wasting its sweetness; and in François' garden—though it had been but a wild tangle of weed and vine, what had she done to dress or to keep it? Was she to wander now into this strong man's life plot, to twist and torture its straight up-

standing trees—to strew its ordered paths? Better die as a woman than live any longer as a wind. But Virginia could not say all this to Davis. She could only draw away her hands and say with dignity:

"Thank you, Mr. Davis, but I will not take the boat tonight."

"You must!" Davis caught her hands into a closer clasp, a master of men not made to be denied. "You must. I cannot go away and leave you here unprotected. Don't you understand that you are dear to me? Let me take care of you. You can stay at the convent until your divorce is granted—then we can be married"—

"You forget, Mr. Davis. I was married to François by the priest, and as long as François lives I will be married to him."

"Do you love him? You know you do not! Did you ever love him?"

"No; it was Albert I loved."

"Albert." The Boss lifted his head, released her hands, took his hat from the altar.

"That woman passing yonder with a basket is coming to the front door," he said. "Now here's what I am going to do—I am going to wire the sister superior to send a carriage to meet The City of the South when she ties up on Thursday. I am going to take a passage for you and I am going to believe with all my heart that you are a good little girl and will go on board as you are told. Just stay here until you hear the whistle, then go across to the landing, or, the clerk at the hotel will see you on board. She's

at the door—you better kneel down. I'll go out as I came—Here, good-bye''—

Then the thing called control failed, torn through by the untamed flood. Virginia was caught up as on the rush of the crevasse, held closely, kissed on eyes and lips—and left alone with no flower in her hair.

The woman at the door came in, she was an old woman with live ducks in her basket. Virginia knelt and the old woman knelt beside her. Their heads bowed meekly, their lips moved, their fingers told the beads. The ducks quacked out foolishly in the pauses between their whispered prayers.

## CHAPTER XII

# The Talking of the Star

WHEN a keeper came to close the church door against the water that would be wandering there that night, Virginia left the shrine of the Virgin and went down to the levee. The other woman with her duck and basket had been gone a good while. Virginia did not know who she was or where she had gone—she had not tried to know.

"I wonder," she said to herself, as she followed the way of the weary street "I wonder where a wind should go when it wishes to rest?"

The River wide and wilful gave ready answer. Many times had her murky waters made silent burial for despair. Virginia heard the answer and—What else was there that she could do?

The steamboat whistle came, deep-throated and serene; the man at the sounding sang his "Mark Twain," the gang plank swung down to the landing; the rush ran over it. Hoarse voices and continuous clamor of loading; and through it all his voice husky and hurried with its parting plea:

"You will take the boat—The City of the South."

"No," Virginia said aloud, "I will not take the boat." And as a thing that the wind had tired of, flung aside and forgotten, homeless, penniless, between the water that drew on and the water that

waited she stood on the levee and watched The City of the South go by. The fastest boat on the River, stately and tall, her white paddle boxes and their letters in gold gleamed proudly through the murk of that murky day. Virginia smiled to see it go by unshaken—like Davis in its strength and courage.

"I am glad I did not go," she said, and saying it saw how much she had wanted to go. How his pledge of protection had tempted her, how her weakness had been pleading with her for the safety and shelter of his strength:

"I will not be a wind in his garden. No, no,—after I knew—how it was with him; after—he—No, no! It would have been wrong for me to take the boat. It would have been wicked."

But then, if neither, the River's answer nor the boat's answer, what answer? Virginia did not know. It had been a long day and she was tired. Still, even in her weariness, she must do something. It was getting late. Over in the gray west, faint against the gloom of it an early star was beginning to flicker. More than a year since she had seen it, but the words her grandfather had taught her came obediently in greeting:

"Des étoiles me parlent d'espérance, me parlent de Dieu," she whispered absently; then, rousing, smiled a little sorrowfully, for the sorrow of the thought:

She who was of so little use in life—so idle and so vain, could any star ever talk to her of heaven or of hope?

Yet the star talked on with its far faint flicker

through the grayness and the gloom, talking not of heaven, nor perhaps of hope; but telling as bravely as may be of a shelter from the night. It spoke of Virginia's farm between the old levee and the new. Her dot—Hers if François had not sold it. Who would buy it, thrown outside the levee as it was? And yet the thought had little cheer. Even if the farm was hers to claim for shelter, she did not know the road to it, nor how far it was from Bogue Vache. It was somewheres to the south of her—that was all Virginia knew.

"If I had a boat I could just go down with the River until I came to the bend where the tall pecan trees are."

"Having no boat nor any great care for one, Virginia moved on listlessly along the levee—the thought that she was at least going away from Bogue Vache kept her feet stepping on and on. And so in her slow, tired stepping, Virginia came upon a pirogue adrift in the slack water along the levee. Old, weather-worn and worm-eaten it nosed its way along while an old man slept in the bottom of it, his face turned up to the failing light.

"My grandpa!"

Could it be her grandfather—this neglected, abandoned old man flung down there in the bottom of a rotting boat; mud-marked, water-stained, his thin white hair straggling from under his dirty cap,—with a face all fallen together like a fool's?

It was the same old pirogue; the same old paddle that her grandfather's hand had worn so smooth at

the handle. Virginia leaned down, touching paddle and touching prow, her eyes on that empty face:

"My grandpa. And he is alive!" Kneeling on the levee Virginia sobbed, praying and giving thanks in prayer. She would take him home to her little farm and she would cherish him so tenderly, so tenderly.

M. Lerot awoke. The River that had taken him away in passion had brought him back in sport. This was all Virginia could gather from his broken talk of swamp and mud bank. Further explanation came to her in a confused way among her mixed emotions and hardly heeded in her straining tenderness. The crevasse at Logan had filled some small bayou until it broke through the dike across its mouth and so gave back to the River its own wild water again. The old pirogue riding the crest as a log might have ridden it had come through with the flood and followed it on down stream. A miracle, or very nearly a miracle had been wrought to bring him safe to his baby's feet, but Monsieur, sleeping, had not known—did not know it now.

"Ma Bébé," he said, and smiled—the weak smile of one whose mind has wandered and will never come quite clearly home again.

Virginia tried hard to keep her cheer:

"You will go with me, my Grandpa, to my little dot like you used to call it on the Island. I will sew and make money, and I will cook and scrub and make garden for you like you used to make for me. And won't we be happy there?

But to her cheer the old man gave only a murmuring:

"Ma Bébé," and turned to doze again—and the night came down.

Virginia kneeling in the prow guided the pirogue's blunt nose along the smoothly sodded side of the levee as she had so often in childhood guided it through the tangle of the garden going across False river to the Island school. She was sixteen years old now—a married woman who had not been a mother, a maid who might not marry—her life before her a thing of solicitude and fear.

"My Grandpa," she said, "we will know when we come to the right place because we will see the tall pecan trees there."

Monsieur made no answer, he was asleep. The night deepened upon his sleeping until even the leading line of the levee was lost in darkness—and there was only the hush and the wash of the wreckage going down to the sea.

"If it stays so dark I shall not be able to see the pecan trees—I shall not know." The darkness deepened with the thought, the River grew wide. Virginia did not know where she was—how much farther she had to go or if, indeed, she had already gone too far.

"If only my Grandpa were safe," she whispered. And it was then while she kneeled clinging to her paddle lonely and afraid that there came to Virginia a swift up-rushing of glad wings in her breast. Wings of a wild, sweet joy, sweeping exultantly they

swept the loneliness from the River, the darkness from the night. Somewhere in the world there was a strong man with steady eyes and stern lips! So how could the world be a lonely place for her? The world was a glad, dear place, and she loved it. Loved the dirty streets of Bogue Vache because he had walked them; loved the great wide River because he had looked upon it; loved the darkness and loved the day because they had soothed and lighted him on his brave, straight way. Where he was she did not know, but he was there, somewhere, clean and fine and true—and she loved him.

## CHAPTER XIII

# On Guard

DAVIS was standing guard; his eyes on the darkness, his ears on a strain—while shame stooped over him and heaviness wore him down. Twenty-four hours with his boots on and twelve more hours to wear them; but it was not the want of rest or sleep that bent his brows and broke his bearing. He had come upon her praying there in the silence and the incense, so young, so alone and—he had taken her lips ruthlessly as a love-mad boy might have done.

Davis stooped and gave himself to the sting.

"I should have been on my guard—I should have known how it was with me." He shifted his gun sharply to his left shoulder, his right hand felt for the flower in his pocket and, having found it, gathered it close. Where was she now? On board The City of the South? Small hope that she would trust herself to his keeping after that. So for a while standing there, straining into the night, his hand on the flower, he lived it deeply again—her lashes against his cheek, her lips of swift withdrawal.

"I'd give my life to know that she was safe," he said, and he meant it.

"Whom can she turn to?" He shifted his gun back sharply to the hollow of his elbow and walked on:

"As for her loving Albert—that is all nonsense.

She is too young yet to know what love means. Well, I did the worst I could.'' He took thought moodily of the last hour of the wretched day—the hotel office when he had returned to it; the joking about the little green book that had broken off so abruptly at his entrance; the looks exchanged behind his back when he called for François' bill and paid it. The French obsequiousness of the clerk when he booked a passage for her on the packet:

''But certainly, Monsieur. I will myself see Madame to the very door of her stateroom''—Davis roused to swear yet again at the veiled meaning of that Madame:

''Why couldn't the fellow say Madame François? I ought to have plastered his face against the wall behind him.''

But the heavy question came again and choked his anger down.

Where was she now in her loneliness—in her large-eyed loveliness?

''I should not have left. I should have picked her up and put her on board that boat—I should have staid on in Bogue Vache and let this levee go to thunder. I had done about all the harm I could do—an hour longer couldn't have hurt much more—I've made a horrid mess of it.'' Then anxiety came and wrung him with its anguish.

''I'd give my life to know that she was safe!''

But at a sound Davis again became the alert guard he had been last night, leaning toward the water, his breath caught in, his thumb on the hammer, cocking

softly. Down there in the River at his feet a drop of water had dripped from a lifted oar:

"Hold on there! What are you doing here?"

The challenge rang sternly, to be answered by a cry—of amazement, but not of that alone:

"Mr. Davis!"

"*You!*" And being on guard as he was, with his lips locked and his lantern out, Davis said no more.

Virginia was helped and swiftly put safe on shore, her grandfather was placed silently beside her. The patient old pirogue itself was rolled over, bottom up on the levee, lest the persistent bumping of its blunt old nose do damage to the sodded side—lest, indeed, one dear little woman should by any chance take such perilous passage in it again. When all this had been done with the straight determined stroke of strength, Davis picked up his lantern and spoke.

"I'll see you across the road to your gate. I didn't know you were coming here—tonight."

Virginia walked in the path of quivering light:

"I didn't know it either. I met my Grandpa in his pirogue and we came on together."

Davis turned on her sternly:

"Well, don't ever do that again!"

"No," Virginia promised meekly, "I will not." And she asked:

"Is any one living here now?"

"They moved out when the stage reached twenty and four. You'll find a pretty good garden here, but I guess they cleaned out the groceries. This"—he pulled his lunch from his pocket—"this will be a

little something for you to snack on until morning. Here you are, M. Lerot."

"Wait," Virginia interposed, "What are you doing? You are giving us your supper. I cannot let you do that."

M. Lerot took the package, smelling the meat in it, and walked on through the gate. When Virginia would have stopped him, Davis put the matter impatiently aside: "Oh, bother, bother,"— he got out his pocketbook:

"It is of no consequence—Let me give you this—and about sending into Bogue Vache for your things tomorrow morning. There will be a man going in from here with a boat, he can bring your boxes along with the rest if you wish."

Virginia was bending her head to the light to look at "this." She said thank you, and then:

"Mr. Davis, you have paid this bill."

"Oh, it is all right—I—didn't want you to be annoyed. You can settle for the cinque sous whenever you want to. Now, see here."

Virginia looking up with a smile for his absurdity saw his face lined and gray in the lantern light, and cried before she could check the impulse:

"Oh, you are so tired!"

"No, no," Davis denied with sudden lightness. "No, I do not know that I am particularly tired. Here—you had better keep the lantern. Take care of yourself. Good night."

"You are so tired," how sweetly she had said it!

"She is not his wife. She never was his wife. The

idea of a fourteen-year-old girl taking a vow that could be binding on her for life! It's all folly—not even a Roman Catholic could stand for that."—Down the Mississippi River in the rotten old pirogue. —The gentle dignity of that "Mr. Davis." How fine she was, how flawless, tired, strained and distressed as she must have been—now brave and steady in her courage:

"Just the finest little woman in this wide world!"

And there was her face in the light again, with its shadow of concern, its tenderness:

"You are so tired."

"If I can only persuade her to get a divorce the pope can go to thunder."

And then came the dignity of her "Mr. Davis" setting aside his will, denying his love and longing, making a wall of her marriage vow.

Davis shifted his rifle and bent his head, and so walked on by the River, keeping watch with the wonder of a woman's waking face and with the laws of God—not with the stately statutes traced upon tablets of stone, but keeping watch with the living law that the Lord God who made it has written into the body of a man.

And at the end of the watch the gray light came to show, to whomever might be there to see, the face of the River and its run of ruin; to show to Madame Croisant in the dew by her garden gate a man whom she feared and idealized and loved and honored.

"M. Davee," she cried, hurrying, courtesying to his lifted hat. "M. Davee. Oh, you will come in

house and have some coffee? Me, I shall be glad. I shall''—

But the man by the gate put her politeness pleasantly aside:

''No, thank you, Madame. All I want this morning is a bed and I am on my way to that now.'' And then because he was the Boss direct of method and determined still, though tired, Davis asked:

''Didn't you tell me once you knew the people who lived over yonder?''

''M. Jacobs and his Madame''—

''No. No, not Jacobs. Tomas Cleve.''

''Oh, mais oui. Virginia Cleve and me, we was big friends.''

''Her daughter moved in there last night.''

''Virginia? But, M. Davee! Virginia!''

''Yes. Yes, she came last night. Now see here, what I want you to do for me. Get hold of that fellow Jacobs and tell him that he can't go back to that place any more. Tell him to come to me and I'll settle with him for his lease and his crops. I'll find another farm for him. Can you do that?''

''Oh, mais oui, Monsieur. Today I can do it—tout-de-suite. But, Virginia? And François, Monsieur. François?''

Davis was opening the garden gate. Madame heard an inarticuate sound of annoyance and then the short explanation:

''He's cleared out.''

''Cleared out? Mais, Monsieur, Virginia? She is alone yonder?''

"No, no! Her grandfather is with her. Good morning."

"Her grandpa? M. Lerot? But I thought he was dead!"

"Well, he is very nearly that." This was in the Boss's distinct utterance that told politely but positively of an impatience that would stand not another word. Madame amazed and mystified, let him go—numb to the knees from long standing, tired, and heavy enough in his heart, God knows. And Madame, in her tenderness, understood it all.

"Pauvre garçon," she whispered, watching him walk away. "Pauvre garçon."

Madame Croisant made coffee and went with a steaming pot of it, hurrying across the new levee to the farm next her own.

She came upon Virginia gathering some of M. Jacobs' vegetable for breakfast and sat the coffee-pot down excitedly upon the steps:

"Mais, ma cherie," she cried. "Ah, it is glad I am. It is one beautiful woman you have grown to be! Ah, it is de pleasure"—And so saying she folded Virginia in her arms and sobbed as though her heart were breaking. "It is de *pleasure!*" she kept insisting between her sobs. "It is de *pleasure!*"

Virginia was kissed and cried over and gathered closely yet again. Then Madame dried her eyes:

"It was M. Davee tell me you were here. He stop at gate to say me bon jour. And he say to me, 'You know M. Tomas Cleve? Voilà, his daughter has come home.'"

Virginia's lips wanted to smile. Davis, she fancied was being misquoted.

"You know Mr. Davis, Madame?"

"Mais oui, I know him. 'T is plenty times," and Madame Croisant told it with pride. " 'T is plenty time he has left his compass wit' me. And *right now* I have his compass in my kitchen. Voici, Virginia, I have fetch you some hot coffee to show you how I am glad to see you some more.—M. Lerot! Bon jour, Monsieur. I see you well?"

Responding as a cello string responds with the note that is struck from it, Monsieur made courteous answer:

"Bien, Madame. Je vous remercie. And you?" But his words came weakly, his eyes wandered, and he paid no attention to Madame's cheerful recital, touching the good health of herself and family. Madame covered his condition with calm unconsciousness and resumed to Virginia:

"Well, when M. Davee say it to me, it was one *surprise.* I say to myself I must hurry to run say you bon jour. And I say 'Ma foi!' " 'T is for six year her mamma and we was big friend. And she has come to live here and, please God, she and me we will be big friend aussi. And I was glad. Yes, I was glad."

"Oh, Madame," Virginia said softly. "You are so kind."

"Well," Madame returned brightly, "I am glad in my heart. And when woman is glad in her heart, it

is kind wit' her tongue she will be. N'est-ce past vrai?''

Virginia smiled with trembling lips:

''Thank you so much for this. Can't you come in and stay a little while?''

''Not now, no. I t'ank you. I must hurry and go cook my old man some breakfast. By and by I will come and we will have one big talk, yes!''

They had the big talk shortly after breakfast. Virginia told freely her plans—how she hoped to get sewing enough to pay for the bread and coffee and clothes for her grandfather and herself. And Madame told eagerly of a planter's wife who was always in want of sewing to be done for herself and her children.

''And if you make good garden,'' Madame wound up brightly.

''Yes, I shall make a good garden,'' Virginia agreed simply. She had no idea of the work that went into the making of a garden, of the hot sun and hard labor. Other women who were not afraid to work could make a garden, therefore she who was so eager to work could make one too. So ran her reasoning and Madame Croisant was not one to discourage. Virginia confessed frankly her ignorance of cooking and scrubbing, and Madame responded volubly with painstaking recipes for gumbos made with okra and crayfish—and for scouring:

''You pound some brick, *fine* like. You sprinkle it plenty on floor. You pour some water, you take your palmetto root. Voilà in corner yonder—you scrub, scrub. All over floor you scrub. You pour

plenty water, you sweep it off wit' broom. You take your clot' and get down on knees and you wipe up all water is left on floor. And when your floor dry, it will be white, yes. You must not make track on it 'til it is dry, no!''

And through the whole of the big talk not a word or a question that could wound. Not a breath of François, not a glance at Monsieur's vacant face.

Virginia was heartened by the talk. She made the gumbo with some okra from the garden and some crayfish that Madame sent over and it was a good gumbo. After dinner she said bravely:

''Now I will scrub my kitchen floor and it will have until supper time to dry without getting any tracks on it.''

## CHAPTER XIV

# Tracks

Now Madame Croisant had been so busy in telling *how* a kitchen floor should be scrubbed she had forgotten to tell *when,*—and Virginia did not know. A Madame who knows does not take the middle of a May day while the kitchen is hot with the fires of cooking to scrub her kitchen floor. At that hour Madame will sleep, and having waked refreshed will pound her bricks in the shade, set her pails of water in readiness, and when the supper has been cleared away and the late cool evening comes, Madame will scrub her kitchen and shut the door satisfied in the certainty that it will be well dried before morning and in no danger from tracks.

Virginia did not know these things, but she did know that her grandfather's face had seemed to get back a shadow of its strength as he ate the good gumbo. And she thought that if he should wake from his after-dinner sleep to find everything nice and clean—loving cleanliness as he always had—some happiness might come into his empty eyes. She raided Madame Jacobs' hoard of brick bats, pounded a lot of them into dust, and strewed the dust upon her floor in haste and eagerness and with a generous hand. She drew a bucket of water from the well and brought the palmetto scrub from the corner.—It was made

of a palmetto root two feet long. A hole had been bored into the root and a stout handle thrust into the hole. It weighed many pounds and was by far the heaviest thing Virginia had ever picked up. But she did what Madame said—she slopped a little water on the brick dust to soften it and she scrubbed, scrubbed, scrubbed. Her hair shook loose and her face ran sweat. If there was any breeze stirring that day between the old levee and the new it did not come Virginia's way. But she clung to her clumsy tool until every inch of the floor had been scrubbed over from beginning to end. Then she essayed the second step—or was it the third? Because of the scrubbing and the heat she was a little dizzy—but anyway it was to bring water—plenty of water and wash the brick dust from the floor with a broom:

"And the broom will be much lighter than the scrubbing brush," Virginia reflected.

The well bucket, though, was not light and to bring plenty of water means to draw up many buckets from the well—using a rope that is rough to tender hands. Virginia brought buckets of water and flushed the floor. Her shoes got wet and her skirts draggled. But no matter, in a minute or two she would be done and be all dry and nice looking before her grandfather awoke. No, not in a minute or two, there was a great deal of brick dust on the floor and it stuck there in streaks. Virginia brought water and more water. Her arms began to ache with the weight of the bucket and her hands to flinch from the rasp of the rope. But she must get that brick dust off

the floor and the only way to get it off was to wash it off. Virginia threw water on and swept it off, threw more water on and swept more water off and—she won. The floor was clean. She found the floor cloth and getting down on her knees began to wipe it up as Madame had said. She was so exhausted now that she was almost sobbing and so wet with slopping and sweating that she was fairly soaked. She backed her way on her knees to the door. When the door was reached she would shut it and the floor would dry without any tracks, though her hair might be streaming over her crimson face and her hands be nearly raw.

"Virginia! Don't you ever do such a thing again! What are you thinking of!" A hand closed above her elbow, a strong arm at her waist swung her up from the floor. "What are you thinking of?" She was face to face with Davis and the horror in his eyes.

"Don't you know that I'll send a darkey to do this—send a dozen darkies if you need them? Don't ever think of doing such a thing as this again! Here, come in here, listen to me. I can't let things go on this way."

Davis swung a chair from the table, seated Virginia and knelt down on the wet floor beside her.

"Can't you understand how it is?" He took her hands and winced to see them so blistered and marred. "You were nothing but a child when you made that vow. Why in the world should you think it binding on you for life? You did not know what you were doing"—

"Wait, Mr. Davis. No, we cannot speak of this. I knew what I was doing. Father Valdmir talked to me a long time. He told me what it was to be married and that it must be for life. I knew"—

'Oh, nonsense! Life—what does a child know"—

"Mr. Davis," Virginia said, she was spent and tired. A little more of this and she would be sobbing—where he wished her to be. And there would be a wind in his garden troubling and twisting its trees, wasting its fruit and its flowers.

"Mr. Davis, will you do something for me?"

"I would do anything in reason or out of it, and you know it."

"Then—will you please go away and never come back again?"

Davis got up, looked at her tired, trembling face for a breath and turned to the window across the room. Standing there with his back to her, his throat aching, his heart hot, he asked in a quiet, pleasant voice:

"Suppose I promised to go away for a good while, wouldn't that do?"

"If you would go and never come back"—

"I don't think I could promise to do that—I'm afraid I might come back in my sleep. Here, suppose we let it go that way. We'll say good-bye for a while—until you have time to think it over."

"I will not think it over—I cannot."

"Well, I can. I will think it over enough for both of us. Let it go that way. Good-bye. Promise me not to do this again. Any darkey can do it and you

can do work that is more worth while. Can't you promise me?''

Virginia could not. Could not find voice for the words. His gentleness was so hard to resist—if he had stormed it would have been easier.

''Good-bye,'' Davis accepted quietly her silence as refusal.

''Good-bye,'' Virginia whispered. And he went away.

Virginia put the chair back where it belonged and shut the kitchen door carefully; but when the floor dried she found the tracks, big and muddy, made by a man's heavy boots. And kneeling down, blind with tears, she laid her hand softly upon the tracks those boots had made.

If Madame Croisant saw the tracks when she came late that evening with some milk for the old man's supper she did not let Virginia see that she saw them. She staid on talking of the Island folk, telling news, until M. Lerot went to bed—and after that, too. Talking, talking, a thought of this, a memory of that and so on through the twilight until François' name was heard in the murmur of blending voices.

''He is gone and I do not wish him to come back,'' Virginia told softly. ''But, Madame, while he lives I am married to him.''

''C'est bien,'' said Madame. ''It is true. It is so fat'er say. When man and woman make marry it is for life, it is not for just so long as man shall please or as woman shall please. Some t'ink law can unmarry man and woman. Some—but not Cat'olic, no!''

"I know," Virginia said.

Madame, satisfied, got up to go—searching for a parting word:

"Eh bien, I reckon M. Davee is on levee some more tonight. My old man say it is M. Davee will have to mend crevasse at Logan. But, me, I know Monsieur. While stage is twenty-one and four-tent' he will not go, no.

Virginia said good night and sat on waiting till the stars should rise. Whether Davis was on the levee or gone away to Logan, what difference did it make? She would still be married to François.

"It would be best for him that he should go away—go much farther away than Logan. He is so strong. Once he realizes that it is not right for me to consent to a divorce he will put all thought of it aside and forget it. Ah—there he is." Her thoughts wandered, her eyes grew deep, following the figure limned against the high light above the River. A man's figure that paced the levee and turned and paced again. A figure that would always be there so long as the stage stood at twenty-one and four.

Because of the crevasse at Logan the stage hung at twenty-one and four-tenths for a day longer, climbed slowly to touch twenty-four and one-tenth on the crest of the rise and then began to fall.

Virginia began to feel at home on her little farm. The money for her sewing encouraged her. Soon, she thought she would be able to pay the money she owed—

"The cinque sous," she said, smiling softly. But

about M. Lerot she could not feel cheerful. He woke to eat and ate to sleep. He called her by name, even smiled when she coaxed him, but his smile was drowsy and his eyes as empty as before.

"I will speak to Madame Croisant about it," Virginia resolved. "Maybe she will know—of something that will rouse him—or, if it is better that he should not be roused."

Madame Croisant was getting her dinner ready, scalding and peeling tomatoes for an okra gumbo. Virginia found a knife and pan and sat down by the table to slice the pods of okra while she talked:

"It is about my Grandpa, Madame," she said. "He seems well, but he does not quite—Do you know of anything I could do?"

"Well," Madame said. She considered it, her eyebrows raised above her steaming task. "Well?" Of course Madame knew what it was any man must do if he would be happy and satisfied with his lot on earth, but politeness required her to be not too prompt in reply.

"Well?" and then she brought it out in triumph. "If he should plant cowpea, maybe? Voilà, Virginia, if man would be young—strong—he must work. It is so in garden. If flower quit work it will quit grow—it will fade in leaf, it will hang head—It is so in woods. Violà, how is it wit' tree when it quit work?"—Madame, full of her theme, shook the scalding strips of peel from her fingers, faced around with enthusiasm, checked sharply and cried:

"M. Davee!" And then she said, "Ah, it is de

pleasure. You will walk in kitchen, Monsieur. Me, I will make you some coffee. Ah, it is de *pleasure.*''

It may have been the blue in his nice, new linen suit that made Davis' eyes so bright; it may have been the sunshine that made his glance so glad. Virginia could not tell. She dropped her eyes before his hand had reached his hat. Slicing okra intently she heard him saying in a nice pleasant way:

''No, no, not any coffee for me, Madame. Didn't I leave a compass here with you?''

''Oh, mais oui. And I have it here, your compass,'' she brought it forth proud and laughing from behind her lard jar:

''Rat is so *bad* I was afraid it would get knock from shelf if I did not put it behind somet'ing.''

''Ah, yes; thank you. This is very fine.'' He turned it in his hands. ''Yes, I thought it was this one I had left with you.''

''You are going away, Monsieur?''

''Why, yes. They are sending me to Logan, I believe.''

''Ah. It is so my old man say. He say it is only you can close crevasse yonder.''

Davis' eyebrows lifted a little, his tone was amused:

''Is that so? Well, and now I must say good-bye to you and thank you many times for your goodness to me.''

''Ah, Monsieur. But you were so *welcome!*''

Davis turned toward Virginia, his voice just as kind and pleasant as when he spoke to Madame:

''And won't you say good-bye to me, too?''

Virginia dropped the knife nervously to dry her hand on her apron, but his hand was already there closing her hand in gratefully, all gemmed with okra though it was.

"Good-bye, and thank you too for your patience and kindness."

The same kindly pleasant tone to both of them, the same steady smile at parting and for both of them together at the door a lifted hat. Then Davis turned around sharply, came back into the kitchen, put his compass down on the table at the side of which Virginia was sitting, put his hat down beside the compass and said briskly:

"See here, there is something you two big friends might do for me."

"And what it is, Monsieur? We will be proud, yes."

Davis holding open his coat and with bent face feeling for something in his breast pocket, told her cheerfully:

"You might drop me a postal card once a week to let me know—I had them in my pocket—to let me know—how things are going here. You'll be crossing that new levee every day and if you see any hogs on it, or any *crayfish hole*—you could let me know—Here, I'll address these cards—Let's see? Bogue Vache, or, have you a post office on the Island?"

"We have office on Island, but Monsieur"—

"How do you call it, your post office?"

"Crebiche. Mais, Monsieur"—

"Craybish! How do you spell it?"

Madame put her head sideways:

"Virginia can spell it for you, maybe."

"Yes, maybe *she* can! Can you? Will you be so good?"

Virginia spelled slowly, without looking up:

"C r e b i c h e."

"Ah, I see, it means crayfish." He took it down in his note book. "Thank you." Now I shall address these cards—about where I'll be working this summer and every week if everything is all right. Here, you can just write on one of them 'All right at Crebiche.' If anything is wrong you will write 'Something wrong at Crebiche' and I will come at once. Do you think you can do all that for me?"

"Me," Madame said eagerly, "I can tell Virginia if I see hog, if I see crayfish. But it is Virginia must write it you."

"And do you think you could find time to do that? Drop me one of these cards every week?"

Virginia bent over her okra, Madame Croisant was watching her. Davis, dropping his pen to the floor to cover her pause:

"Just once a week?"

"Once a month—I might"—

"That will help a whole lot! Thank you!" He moved to the end of the table, put down the pack of postal cards and leaning down began to address them. Writing rapidly, he said to Madame nicely with his neat utterance:

"See, here, Madame, can't you spare me one of your pretty posies out yonder for my coat?"

Indeed Madame could in a minute she would have it here—it was sweet olive that he liked best of all. Ah, she had not forgotten that!

Davis leaning over the table, his hand gripping the edge of it, the pen caught cigar-wise between his fingers, his eyes intent on the card, said instantly:

"If you had been his wife it would have been different. But you never were—his—wife."

Virginia thought to keep silent, just to go on slicing okra till Madame came again. But he wanted it, that assurance that was hers to give—and it was so little she could give him—

"I never kissed him."

Davis shot the postals to the far end of the table and leaned over, writing hard, his broad blue sleeve between Virginia's face and the entering Madame's eyes.

"Oh, but Monsieur. You should have chair!"

"No! No, this is all right. I am doing famously. I'll be through in a minute."

In a moment more, when Virginia had lifted her face with a quick, recovering breath, he straightened up, pushed the postals to one side, took the sprig of sweet olive with a pleasant word of thanks, caught up his compass and hat and so went away quickly to catch a boat, baring his head to them both at the door, but not offering to shake hands—not quite daring to perhaps.

His back looked broad in the sunshine to a woman's watching eyes.

When the garden was empty and the light shining

down on an unshadowed path, Virginia took the cowpea seed Madame urged upon her and went to rouse her grandfather from his endless dreaming:

"Voilà," she cried brightly, speaking the French that he seemed to understand most readily, "Voilà. Cowpea seed for you, my grandpa. It is Madame Croisant send them to you, to plant in your garden. You would wish to plant some now, maybe?"

Monsieur took the seed and turned them over in his palm.

"Non," he said slowly. "Wind will take garden—it is not for me to plant. Wind shall take all I have if it wish. It is so I have make my swear to Le Vent."

"Le Vent," the words were like a whip. Virginia, quivering, slipped inside the house:

"Oh, it was a wrong thing for me to do. I should not have shaken hands with him—I should never have promised to send the cards each month. He must forget about me. He must! Oh, it was wrong of me!"

Through all the first month of Davis' absence Virginia debated her course between two lines of dishonor. To send the card and remind him of herself; or, not to send it and so break the promise she had made to him—the only promise. When the end of the month came she took the package from its secret place.

"I will send one this month as I promised, but next month I will just let the day go by. When he finds

that I am beginning to forget, he will forget also. She wrote what she had to write:

"Everything is all right at Crebiche," then turned the card over:

"Richard Davis," she had never thought about his having a first name—had always thought of him as Mr. Davis." "Richard." It looked very friendly there, written in his short, strong characters. "Richard—Dick!" Virginia flushed up furiously and hid the card. Some one was coming up her garden walk. It was Madame Croisant full of her importance, remembering the date.

"You have not see any hog on levee?" she questioned eagerly.

"No," Virginia had not seen a hog on the levee. Nor had she seen any crayfish hole in the side of it."

"And me eit'er," Madame cried. "And I have watch—God knows I have watch plenty. You will send card to M. Davee? You will tell him 'Every-t'ing is all right at Crebiche'—just like he say. And me, I will take it now and go put it in post office."

After Madame had gone away with the card Virginia sat down on the kitchen steps to think. If Madame was going to "watch" like this, what was she to do? There would be no forgetting at the end of the second month nor of the third.—And *that* was how Mr. Davis had meant it should be! That was why his eyes had been so blue in their smiling, why his clasp had been so gentle, his voice so kind. He had thought out a plan to have his own way. No doubt he had deliberately thought it all out while he

walked the levee up there keeping guard through the night with the stage at twenty-four and one-tenth.

"He is so strong," Virginia thought almost angrily, and then turned with the weary thought from her indignation:

What could his strength avail—prolong a little the hour of their parting—make it a little harder for his dear brave heart.

"If it was only for myself," she said, "I would not care. I would rather love him and be lonely all my life—But for him! Oh, it is wrong, wrong. I must not write to him again."

It was July now and very warm. Virginia worked busily, meaning not to know when the month should end, meaning in some shrewd way to escape Madame's vigilance. She worked in the garden in the early hours and the late ones, as Madame Croisant had taught her to do. Pulling away the weeds and burrs that grew so eagerly in that rich black ground, planting peas where the melon vines had borne their fruit and died; planting cabbages when the tomatoes failed; planting potatoes for the winter, garlic also, and onions. M. Lerot looked on dreamily, he did not try to help. The wind had wasted the fair garden that he had made and Monsieur would never plant another. Virginia knew. And always she counted the days till the end of the month should come that she might forget it when it came.

But before the end of the month was within ten days of its time Madame Croisant came hurrying, and in excitement to Virginia's kitchen door. She had

a letter in her hand. On the back of it was written: "Madame Jean Baptiste Croisant." It was for her, the man at the post office had said so. But why!

"Before I ain't ever had letter," Madame cried. She thrust it upon Virginia. "And I cannot read. Ma foi. For why should somebody write letter to me?"

Virginia's heart caught itself together at the sight of those bravely written words, her voice was low:

"You want me to read it for you, Madame?"

"But, yes. If you please, I wish to know—Ah, it is de fine t'ing school is. 'T is for t'ree hour I have been wish to know—and I could not leave my dinner till it is cook!"

There was nothing so wild or wonderful about the letter. Just a courteous request that Madame would avail herself of the first chance messenger to send the writer word of M. Lerot's state.

"He served me nobly once," the writer said, "And if there is anything I can do for him in his old age I want to do it." And this ran down smoothly into a pleasantly worded request that Madame would hand the enclosed envelope to the old man's grand-daughter and so with kindly words of well-wishing, the letter made an end, leaving Madame to cry in delight: "Ah, it is fine man M. Davee is!" Leaving Virginia to wait as well as she could until Madame should go back again to the dinner that might be burning.

And when she was alone, the envelope torn open with trembling finger, the stiff, clean sheet unfolded,—what were the words that danced and staggered be-

fore her eyes? No courteous salutation—how could he address her as Madame or a Friend—how might he address her otherwise? But there in the middle of the sheet, rather badly written, as though his hand shook a little at the time:

"I was in New Orleans recently and while there consulted an eminent authority upon divorce, etc. He advises me that it might be possible to get a marriage vow annulled by special dispensation from the Pope. He does not speak encouragingly, but if you will only write a 'yes' in the corner of your next card I shall take steps immediately."

It was signed, because he could honestly sign it so—

"Your—Richard Davis."

And for three hours it had been lying around in Madame Croisant's kitchen. How *could* Madame have been so careless! Suppose it had been lost—had fallen into the fire! Virginia was clinging to the letter, conning it over and over, each word, each penstroke—her precious possession. His hand had held the paper, his eyes had looked upon it, his breath blown over it. And it was so like him—each word. She could hear him speaking them, his neat enunciation, his clearly sounded syllables.

By and by Virginia came to the comprehension of his meaning and to the hopelessness of his hope. "A special dispensation!"

"No," she said softly. "There is no hope of that end—he would only waste years perhaps trying for

it. If he once began he would never cease to try for it. No, no, he must not try.''

She saw Davis' eyes—how the blue tones in them would brighten if he should read her ''Yes'' in the corner of the card; saw his lips parting in his sunny smile, showing the tips of those fine white teeth of his; and she said happily:

''I am glad he does not wear a mustache. It would be such a shame to cover a fine face like that with hair.'' Then she remembered that she would never write that ''Yes'' on the card—that she must not.

Must she write a ''no!'' How quickly the days ran down to the end of the month. How the hours crowded her. She must not write as he wished, she could not write as he did not wish. The end of the month came and went and then in a day or two came Madame Croisant, hurrying and excited again:

''I have anot'er letter,'' she cried. ''Vite, is it from M. Davee?''

It was. And it stated very nicely and pleasantly that he had had no news from Crebiche this month, and that if he did not hear at once he would be down Sunday to see what was wrong.

''You did not send card!'' Madame cried, ''You forget. And, me, I forget it also. Oh, Virginia, for God's sake, go get card and write it now. Me I will run to office wit' it. Ma foi! If M. Davee should come Sunday and should be mad! Me, I have see him mad once, I do not wish to see him mad again. God knows I do not. C'est terrible.''

Virginia laughed out from her heart—feeling her-

self close to Davis, looking up to the smile in his eyes, telling him in tender teasing what a terrible fellow Madame Croisant believed him to be. The laugh ended in a sob. She went in quickly, wrote the card and the "No" across the corner of it, and brought it—with the remaining cards to Madame Croisant:

"This is the one to be mailed, Madame. And these others—You had better keep them and get Father Adolph to fix up one for you every month. I can't write them any more."

"You cannot?" Madame questioned, and added quickly:

"C'est bien. I will speak wit' Father Adolph." She sighed for the sorrow of it as she went away, the gentle little Madame who knew the teachings of a woman's heart even as she knew the teachings of her church.

Life was still enough for Virginia after that. All the agony of indecision was past and the load of longing lay without stirring on her heart. She kept very busy and her saving grew until they were nearly as large as the hotel bill that Davis had paid. Soon, very soon, she would be able to return to him his "cinque sous." By the end of summer, she thought. For the fame of her sewing went more and more widely abroad. The little garments she made so daintily were always in demand. She who was neither married woman nor maid, who might never know the throb of mother love, sat hour after hour through her long still day stitching tenderly, making the cunning little clothes only tiny babies wear.

"If I could know that he was happy—that he had forgotten!" Sewing is monotonous work—it leaves the mind free for much thinking. Virginia had had time to live over again each touch and tone and glance, and to think over and over again:

"If I only knew that he was happy. For myself I would rather be lonesome for him all my life than never to have loved him at all."

The days went by slowly and in silence. The pecan boughs were bending with their load of nuts; the oranges were beginning to show faint gleams of gold against the green of leaf and stem before Virginia heard news of Davis.

"Who you t'ink was in my kitchen today?" Madame Croisant came asking, and Virginia's heart sank low. He had been in Madame Croisant's kitchen, just two hundred yards away and had not come where for only a moment she might see his hair and eyes. Well, but then she had wanted him to forget.

Madame Croisant was telling busily all about it. —"and my old man ask him if he has finish wit' crevasse at Logan, and he say yes, about finished. And he say:

" 'Oh, bot'er, bot'er! It is such darned tomfoolery. Piling up dirt to stop that River. What we ought to have is a wall' "—and he talk plenty of wall—of what it was to be made. Me I ain't ever hear of stuff he talk about. And my old man! He keep say 'Sho, sho', but I don't t'ink he know for what it is he say 'sho' so much. I ask him when M. Davee go, what it is wall will be, maybe? And he only laugh. Say,

'Ah, Mon Dieu, M. Davee is sore on crayfish, yes. He has not forgot dike he lost last year.' But before M. Davee go—Virginia, he tell me he wants to see how my garden is grow. Well, me, I say, it will be pleasure to show it him. But what it is I have in garden to show? Summer flower is all dead—autumn flower is not yet open! Mais, M. Davee he does not seem to be look for flower. He just keep walk, walk. So I say to him:

"'You would like some tobacco, Monsieur.'

"But he say:

"'No, no'—"you know how he say it," 'No, I can't smoke de darn stuff.'

"He keep walk some more. And me, it was hot, yes, it was twelve o'clock. I was most sweat. But I keep walk too! And I t'ink pretty soon Monsieur will get tired maybe. He does not get tired, but when he has walked some more he ask me—and, Virginia, it seem funny t'ing for him to ask me too! He ask me how many men dere is on Island who have Albert for name. And how I could tell him? How I could know?

"I tell him it is plenty, God knows.

"Well he take out his book and get pen ready and he say:

"'Give me name of every man who is called Albert.'

"I was scared. I pray to Holy Virgin, and Virginia! I t'ink of book in church where fat'er write name when boy is christen—and I tell him of book and how name is dere.

"M. Davee look hard at me, he say *'Book in church?'* And he say quick:

"'Ah, I understand!' He look at his watch, he lift his hat, he put his hand on post and over my garden fence he go into road!

"Cherie," Madame concluded soberly, "I am sorry for das Albert when M. Davee shall find him."

"Yes," Virginia answered quietly, "Yes, I suppose so."

If Davis had made any inquiries about her or her grandfather, Madame would have told it. But he had come and gone, absorbed in his business bothers, dreaming his old dreams of the concrete wall that should one day control the River and make her a source of untold power. He had gone back to the fine far things they used to talk about when he sat beside her at dinner in the grimy hotel, there in Bogue Vache.

It was better so, much better so. She had been praying all summer that he might forget. How *could* he have remembered her in the midst of his crowding cares and high achievements!

"Oh, yes, it is much better so." Telling her heart this patiently and persistently as though it were a truth her heart found hard to hear, Virginia climbed to the top of the old levee to walk where he had walked so many nights when the stage was high, to note how lonely the River looked lying low between her banks under the late September sunshine, to feel the weariness and the wistfulness of those far away

puffs of smoke that marked the passage of some stately packet steaming her easy way down stream.

Was it The City of the South? And, if she had gone aboard that night.

"No, no," Virginia insisted. But that he should have been so near and she had not seen him. A few hours ago he had been in Madame Croisant's garden, and now—where was he?

The River went slowly, the breeze died down, the smoke streamed heavily from the oncoming stacks, and it was as lonely on the levee as it had been on the land below.

## CHAPTER XV

# The Garden Where the Wind Had Ceased to Wander

"No, the landing below will be nearer than Bogue Vache." Davis leaned on the guards and looked down at the water, chafing impatiently at the slow progress the boat was making. Since he had given Madame that hot walk around her garden he had traveled far. When he went to the priest's house to gain access to the church register of baptisms he found that the book had been locked away and that Father Adolph had gone to a sick parishioner, carrying the key with him. Where had he gone?

"To Alphonse Savier's place," so the old housekeeper said.

Davis knew where that was—not more than five miles away. The quickest way to get the key would be to gallop over to the other end of the Island and ask Father Adolph for it. Davis had his horse, plenty of time, and he wanted to see that register. But he found when he got there that it was not Alphonse Savier who lived here, it was Alphonse Savier pêre. The Alphonse that the priest had gone to see was "way up River, twenty mile, maybe tirty." It was quite probable Father Adolph would stay there all night. Davis had not time to gallop that far, but there was a train going up. He would take the train,

get the key and catch a boat or hire a launch or something coming down. It was more than thirty miles, nearer forty. Davis got there, found the priest, received the key, ran down to the landing and found two boats in—The City of the South and a new boat, making, they said, her first trip down the River. Davis took his passage on the new boat. François was running regularly on The City of the South, gambling in her Texas, and Davis knew it. The boat backed slowly out into the stream, swung her bows round, got under headway. Davis drove his hand into his pocket, felt the key there and beside it a crumbling flower:

"If she would only move along!"

And yet if the boat did move, if he got the register and read the record and found out which Albert it was she loved. What good would it all do?

"None, that I can see!"

The boat had answered his prayer for speed, the water was going in swells from under her paddle-boxes, the wind brushed his cheek.

"If she does love Albert—if she does! She was too young to know what love is. If I could only teach her to know."—He leaned further over the rail. A flush had flung its way hotly to his hair and all the passengers seemed to be suddenly crowding the guards.

In an hour they would be passing the old crayfish bitten levee.

"If I only knew that she was well-cared for and happy—if there was any sense in the separation!"

A cheer tore through his preoccupation.

"Why, what is it all about? Ah, I see, we are racing her."

It was a daring thing for a new boat to do, thus to gaily throw the challenge to the fastest boat on the River, and a brave thing to drive forward keeping nose and nose with the City of the South. But why couldn't she beat her—win the record on her first trip down! The interest swelled swiftly to excitement; the pilot rang his bell, the captain gave eager orders, and the man down in the engine room did all he dared—and more. On The City of the South passengers lined the guards, defying, taunting the temerity that would pass them by; the captain gnawed his lip, the roustabouts rolled their eyes, and up in the Texas the gamblers played poker, betting horse and betting home on the turn of a card. The boats raced on, the late sun shining from the whiteness of their waterline to the blackness of their stacks. Virginia, from the levee leaned to watch. Could they beat her, the beautiful stately boat, so dear because his voice had named her? Nose and nose the packets held their places, their black smoke streamed back like a banner, the water churned and swung. An even race—but below them was a bend and the "City" on the outward curve of it. She must do better or be beaten. A cry went up from her guard, imploring, compelling. She must do better. The captain answered with his orders, the roustabouts yelled, the engineer went wild. And so, just as she came abreast of the levee where Virginia stood, in a great uprush-

ing cloud of steam and thunder, "The City" ceased to be.

"She has blown up," Virginia cried aloud in anguish. "The City of the South has blown up." A moment ago she had been there, proud and swift and fair to see. And now there was a wreck upon the River, some of the men who had cheered were drowning and some of them were dead.

With the steam screaming from her escape pipe the new packet circled and swung bows on the current, a boat put off from her side and in it, standing, calmly giving orders was a man in a blue linen suit and panama hat. There were other boats also, and rafts and belts and ropes flung for rescue. But Virginia did not see them. There was for her only that straight, up-standing figure in the boat that went about so cooly taking in those that struggled and cried for help, and taking in presently one who did not struggle at all. The standing man stooped when they laid the body down, bent over it, made sure,—then taking his hat in his teeth sprang lightly into the River and began to swim ashore:

"Oh, Dick," Virginia cried in terror. "Oh, Dick." She ran down to the bank as though in being there she might reach a hand to catch his hand—way out there in the muddy water. "Oh, Dick." If a cramp should seize him; if an eddy should suck him in. "Oh, Dick!"

Davis swam on, reached the bank and climbed it, settled his hat and took her hands—And Virginia said softly:

"Ah, you are wet."

"Yes," Davis said. "Yes, the River was that way. When they lifted his body in I felt that you ought to know. I came across to tell you. Now tell me"—

Virginia had been watching the little stream of water that was spinning from his pocket, not understanding at all what he said, hearing only his voice, the deep dear timbre of it. He was safe, after that reckless swim, safe and well. When his voice broke off abruptly, nervously, her eyes went up in alarm to his face:

"You are so white. You will take cold in your wet clothes."

"You told me once that you loved Albert," his voice was controlled again and steady.

"Albert? My cousin? Oh, when we were little."

"Virginia. Tell me, who it is you love!"

Virginia began to beg brokenly of his mastery for mercy:

"Mr. Davis, while François is alive"—

"But François is not alive, my child. That is what I keep telling you. Can't you understand? He was on The City of the South when she blew up. Tell me—Virginia?—*Virginia.*"

And even the River grew kind and carried the crowd away; shouting men and drowning men, drifting boat and debris, carried it all away around her bend leaving the man and woman alone in their garden where the wind had ceased to wander, that they might dress it and keep it and make it a holy habitation for the heart.

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